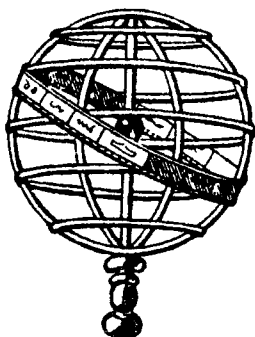


LORDS & LADIES



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LONDON: CHAPMAN & HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

LORDS AND LADIES.

LORDS AND LADIES

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“THE QUEEN OF THE COUNTY,”

“LADIES OF LOVEL LEIGH,”

“BOOK OF HEROINES,”

“THREE WIVES,”

ETC. ETC.

“Musing on the little lives of men—
And how they mar this little by their feuds.”
TENNYSON.

NEW EDITION.

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1876.

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LORDS AND LADIES.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE CAUSE FOR A CHALLENGE AROSE BETWEEN
"THE LORDS AND THE LADIES," AS A CLOUD OF
SMOKE.

§§ **D**EPEND upon it, Squire, there is neither peace
nor comfort to be had in a house overrun by
petticoats !"

Four pair of ears heard this sweeping censure on the female sex—made by the mouth belonging to a fifth pair—which pair ought to have blushed for that mouth.

Did any reply ? Not one.

There must have been a solid—a convincing—an incontestable reason for this lack of gallantry ; which is putting in the mildest light this melancholy statement regarding the chivalry of the present race of the magnanimous Britons ; as (I hope) both sexes will allow. The more so when they hear the reason.

The speaker, and the four hearers, had been politely requested by their hostess, as she left the dinner-room followed by her troop of ladies, to refrain from smoking. It is true, she was a very pretty woman ; it is true she made the request in her sweetest voice and most engaging manner. It is also true, and not to be denied by one of the Lords of the Creation present, that she (one of the "Ladies," who are allowed to "will" and to "won't," merely because they "will

and won't," without giving any reason for so doing) absolutely did point out her new summer curtains (just put up) as an apology for the request; very fresh and spotless they looked too, as none could deny.

As all tidy, home-loving, home-glorifying queens of households are allowed to feel at one of those advents of domestic bliss—a thorough house-cleaning—so did she revel and rejoice in the dainty spruceness of her kingdom. They had seen her (and applauded her) only that day, as she challenged the world to find spot or blemish, an atom of dust or the minutest spider, in the domestic palace to which she welcomed them so warmly. They had watched her, had admired her, glowing with gratified pride, as she walked through her beautiful and fragrant house.

She may (we will not deny it), she certainly may, under the influence of this most pardonable of all vanities, have demanded their forbearance rather than beseeched it.

The human heart, under the best control (as we all know by experience), has its unguarded moments. No doubt we have each of us felt what it is to be moved from our pedestal of moral altitude by the complacent whisperings of a duty well done.

Vanity assails us at such moments from a quarter so unexpected, that we are knocked down without a warning. Thus it may be that, glorying in her garnished and elegant house, Mrs. Joscelyn forgot that she owed allegiance to the king of it. But he did not. Was he not a Lord of the Creation?

He is the squire apostrophised in the first sentence of this veracious tale, and usually a human creature of much urbanity, cheerfulness, and contentment. That is when the nerve opiniatum had not been touched. Very few anatomists have noticed, or rather honoured, this nerve by mentioning it. Yet it runs in distinguishable lines from the brain to the feet, ramifying through the whole frame. In some subjects it overpowers and wholly subjugates every other nerve in the body. Again, in others, it is barely perceptible. In the female organisation it is less developed than in the male, which may be one reason why anatomists care so little to mention it. For it is not a good nerve, or of any manner of use. On the contrary, it is often a source of much discomfort to its owner, and frequently places him, or her, in positions neither comfortable nor creditable. Thus in the female, if it remains only in the brain, and does not spread towards the heart, the quirks, vagaries, and inconsistencies

of its unfortunate owner wear and tear her other nerves all to pieces, as well as the nerves of those with whom she lives. She is like a balloon without ballast—a ship without a crew—a windmill shorn of its grapnel.

In the male species, this nerve seldom approaches the region of the heart, but is so intricately mixed up with every other part of the body, that the slightest touch starts it into instant life; and, during the time it quivers and lives, the reasoning faculties, the moral powers, the higher virtues, succumb before it.

The squire was born with this nerve strongly developed; it had been fostered and encouraged by education and position. He was one of those rare individuals born in this vale of tears, who had never had any occasion to lament it. He was rich, having enough to enjoy every reasonable pleasure in life, in a reasonable manner. He was jovial in temperament, which enabled him to enjoy his riches; he was also fine-hearted, which gave him the chiefest happiness of all—namely, the desire to make others assist him to spend them. He was a happy husband, a fond father, a staunch friend. He lived without care, he had never experienced sorrow, but—he had the nerve opiniatum.

His personal appearance deserves description. He was a well-made, handsome man, and, without being the least vain, he walked about and through the world with that air which says, “You may look at me, from head to foot, within and without, and you will discover a man who is not ashamed of himself, either personally, mentally, or morally.”

And nobody saw him without agreeing to this opinion. He was in all respects “a proper man.” His bright florid complexion bore the marks of having been kissed by the summers of forty years. His merry blue eyes twinkled and danced as if a jovial spirit lurked within their clear azure. His handsome nose rose straight between them in a certain majesty of form, as if, by conscious dignity, to curb the “laughing devil” peeping out in the eyes. A short upper-lip began a well-formed mouth and chin. Perhaps the upper lip was a little deficient in fullness—a sign that proves the indisputable possession of the nerve opiniatum.

His well-shaped head was furnished with clusters of rebellious rings of fair hair, short and crisp. His chest, magnificently developed, expanding in kindness to all the world, was supported on firm, well-shaped legs, whose shapely feet had that elastic tread which belongs to the healthy, wealthy, and contented among mankind.

Such was the squire—to which must be added that he was faultlessly dressed in the evening costume of an English gentleman of the present day.

But at this present moment he is not looking his best. A frown sits upon his brow, an unusual visitant—so unusual, indeed, that one can hardly think it is the squire sitting before us. He is biting the nail of the thumb of his right hand, an act of which he has the greatest abhorrence (in another), and which he would be prepared, conscientiously and vehemently, to deny doing himself, from his own often-expressed conviction that it is an “ungentlemanly trick.”

But the fact is, he does not in the least know what he is about. A sudden pressure of the nerve opinium has, for the nonce, got possession of him, physically and mentally. Will it conquer him? If it does, my story is at an end. Fortunately (I hope) for my readers, his companions are in league with the nerve opinium.

They must be described.

Let us begin with the only one who has yet spoken—he who uttered that unjust, base, never-to-be-forgiven calumny upon petticoats.

He is tall, spare, not ill-made; in fact, he has a good figure, well-knitted together, which is a virtue in him that must be accorded, as it is about the only thing there was to praise in him!

As regards age, he was quite as old as the squire, though no petticoat was ever more weak in allowing the fact. In short, he did not allow it. If all his subterfuges, all his evasions, all his bare-faced—let us say “fibs,” as the mildest mode of recording his utter disregard of truth on the subject—his tremendous “fibs” were collected together, and placed before a dispassionate jury, composed of equal parts of both sexes, I feel sure he would gain the day over the weakest woman that ever lived.

But I don't wish to be hard upon him; inasmuch as nature herself has not been too kind, as must be acknowledged by unprejudiced parties when they read the description of him.

Thin wiry hair, with no colour at all, was plastered over that part of his cranium which time had cruelly, inexplicably made bare, giving a very meagre appearance to a skull that was already remarkable for an oddity of shape and a strange deficiency in intellectual bumps.

Little reddish greenish eyes blazed out from beneath such

bushy brows, it was inevitable the thought, that some of their luxuriance would be well bestowed a little higher up.

His face was wholly made up of puckers, which concentrated themselves into a focus—his nose. And as if contented to form the base of that wonderful feature, the rest of it was a round shining knob, on which bloomed, with ever-varying tints, according to heat and frost, port wine or none, all the bright shades of the rose.

His mouth resembled the withered puncture of an old apple, and his chin was never free from the marks of the rough usage of an unkind razor.

His dress was not too costly, and utterly without taste, both of which might have been forgiven, had he attended to those little niceties of toilette which mark the true gentleman.

For, to say nothing of a little eccentricity as to the needlessness of absolute snowy linen, or the necessity of washing his hands too often (at times one might suppose once a week was considered by him enough), his general appearance was always more or less of a sporting character. Even in a ball-room (where, strange to say, he always appeared, and always in a chronic state of grumbling and growling), his general aspect was such that strangers have often taken him for some respectable gamekeeper who had wandered into the ball-room by mistake in his Sunday suit.

This passion for balls always excited in those friends who were honoured with his confidence the greatest surprise. He began to grumble the moment one was mooted ; he grumbled through the different phases of the first question of how, when, and where, to the moment when the fly arrived to take him to it. He grumbled all the time he was at it, though he generally came with the fiddlers and went out with the candles.

“Why did he go?” argued his friends and admirers, if he had any.

Nobody knows, unless it was the pressure of the nerve opiniatum.

This nerve had the individual and entire possession of the body and soul of Captain Crabshawe.

It is needless to say he was a bachelor. Unlike Squire Joscelyne, who lost his temper and bit his right thumb-nail when his nerve opiniatum was touched, Captain Crabshawe only felt happiness when his whole frame was quivering. Consequently, upon this evening the bloom upon the round knob that did duty for his nose was spreading with becoming

radiance over his whole face, suffusing into one the various little efflorescences that adorned his countenance.

On his right hand sat a pleasant, unremarkable-looking man, who, apparently aware that fate had accorded him no striking physiognomy, had endeavoured to repair the mistake by art. His collar was turned down, which, so far from giving him a poetic or Byronic look, merely enabled his friends to see that he was rather fat about the throat. His hair, oily and smooth, was parted down the middle, and, turning abruptly round, sent the ends into the corners of his eyes, making them wink and appear tender. This mode of dressing the hair, styled the "intellectual," had not the effect of imparting much wisdom to the countenance of Mr. Spooner. On the contrary, he resembled one of those comfortably-clad, turnip-fed, and turnip-loving sheep, whose equable minds are disturbed neither by the dog of yesterday nor by the prospect of becoming mutton to-morrow.

He had a splendid pair of whiskers—that his bitterest enemy allowed—which, besides being so bushy and excellent of their kind, afforded him a great deal of amusement, not to say help. For no matter what he was doing, in his office at the bank, where he, a junior partner, was signing away thousands perhaps, receiving in millions probably—at home, in dressing-gown and slippers, reading a novel—in the park—sprucely dressed at dinner, imbibing soup—after dinner smoking a cigar—in all and each of these duties, each important in its way, his whiskers were taken hold of, drawn out, minutely scanned sideways, and consulted on every occasion. In short (let us make the remark without ill-nature), generally a man is spoken of as a "man with whiskers." In Mr. Spooner's case, it would only be doing justice to his if we said, "whiskers with a man," or a "Lord of the Creation."

He was not very tall, not very clever, not very anything, yet he had the natural and much-to-be-commended desire to be everything. So he had a smattering of this thing, a slight knowledge of that, a sort of inkling of a metaphysical kind, which puzzled him more than anyone else. He dabbled in politics, flirted with scandal, and trifled with characters. In a word, he had a most ardent desire to be thought clever and intellectual, and, in strict truth, he was an amiable, simple noodle of a man, without any character at all.

He was unexceptionable in dress and manner generally, but sometimes, when straining after inspiration, he was apt

to forget the latter. He could very well have borne to be handsomer, more manly, more dignified, but then, like the Dodo, ~~he~~ would have had less excuse to look ~~as~~ if he was mourning over his deficiencies. His soul aspired to be great, but his body was only fitted for great things moderately developed. The nerve opiniatum was so slightly demonstrated in him, it may be questioned if it could be perceived further than in the female subject.

Mr. Spooner was a married man. He had experienced that happy state exactly six months. He was just entering that dangerous flux of the tide matrimonial, wherein a sort of maelstrom ensues, from the vortex of which is thrown up all the bits of the barque of happiness—the vessel in which he had set sail on the voyage of matrimony. How many of these bits he and his wife could save from the wreck, it is not our business to inquire. We only know, the more they could collect the safer and more pleasant would be their voyage together hereafter.

From the circumstances under which he and his wife had begun that interest in each other which ended in matrimony, it was not unreasonable to fear that some few storms would assail their first start in life's voyage, ere they sailed amicably together for the rest of it. The germ of their first interest in each other arose out of the discovery that their initials were the same—A. S.—Augustus Spooner, Arabella Strutt.

This led to remarks—remarks brought on consequences—consequences ended in matrimony, and Mr. and Mrs. Spooner were now undergoing the ordeal of testing their love for each other by something more tangible than the fond fantasy of jointly owning two letters in the alphabet. At the first onset of their matrimonial career, they laid themselves open, ~~be~~ it whispered, to the privilege of having another S added to the first. This phase over, the reaction ~~was~~ great the other way. Dropping the character of an adoring lover, and taking up that of a comfortable lazy husband, the male A. S. lacerated the heart of his dotting wife.

In foregoing the angelic graciousness of the bride, and adopting the fidgets and fancies of the wife, the female A. S. was calling forth into life and vigour the nerve opiniatum of her devoted spouse. Thus is explained (or excused) wherefore two married men had neither of them the grace, much less the inclination, to snub Captain Crabshawe for his libel upon petticoats.

It was, therefore, not to be expected that young bachelors should dash to the rescue, and transfix the libeller with the

sharp lance of indignation, when the older, married, experienced, not only declined the pleasing task, but seemed to agree in the base calumny. No ; they sat silent and thoughtful.

As the utmost confidence ought to subsist between the writer and the reader, the former informs the latter that one of them, Sir George Follett, Bart., really did think, and this was his thought :

“’Twas dooced hard they couldn’t smoke !”

Sir George was a young gentleman of whom it may be said the species is very common. Early spoilt by an adoring mother, and a still more adoring world, he was unable to look at a single thing in it according to a plain matter-of-fact view. Naturally he was born with a good heart. His propensities were most of them amiable, but such were the trammels that surrounded him, he hardly knew he had a heart at all—in fact, he had never had any occasion to require one. Everybody loved him, admired him, and praised him without. Consequently he was rather vain, a little selfish, and irrevocably impressed with the idea that every unmarried woman that came into juxtaposition with him was possessed with the fatal and determined idea of becoming Lady Follett. “It was dooced hard to deny them, but positively a choice in the matter he must have—really he could not consent to be married by force !”

He was well-looking—something of a fop, and secretly very anxious to marry. He was not strong enough to be possessed of many nerves, so the nerve opiniatum was wholly undiscoverable in his organisation.

Having confided so much to the reader about Sir George, it now becomes the writer’s duty to be equally confidential regarding Mr. Summers. Why do I say Mr. ? No one after the second interview ever called him anything but Summers ; and after the third Frank ; after the fourth, Summ, and so on. Shortening, lengthening, mimicking, apostrophising, and altering after every conceivable fashion his two names—Francis Summers. For he was beloved. He, too, was thinking—so deeply, indeed, that I quite credit, and beg the reader will do so also, his solemn assertion that he did not hear Captain Crabshawe’s disgraceful libel, or he would instantly have challenged him there and then. But he was thinking—it was a strange, a bewildering thought, and concerned a brown hat. In the circumference of that brown straw hat, further bounded by the folds of a blue veil, was a sight, a view, a vision, that contained for him everything

most fair on earth—nothing that out of ocean's treasures she could match, and containing to him almost as much of heaven as the blue sky itself.

Francis Summers was a fair, slight, handsome young fellow of eight-and-twenty years of age. Like Sir George, he was an only son, and had a doting mother ; but unlike Sir George, these two circumstances rather developed the best feelings of his nature than deteriorated them. So far from becoming selfish and vain, he was amiable and modest, to a degree that rather interfered with a true judgment of his character. Mr. Spooner's ambition was to be thought better of than he deserved. Frank Summers was satisfied with only half the praise that was his due. Thus the one generally disappointed his friends, while the latter always surprised them. He had an independent fortune, and was known to be in search of a wife. This caused a commotion amongst his friends. Either Frank's bachelor establishment was too pleasant to be done away with, or they were so fond of him personally, they could not suffer him and all his amiabilities to be absorbed by a wife.

The squire alone stood his friend in the matter. Captain Crabshawe was vehemently opposed to the very idea.

Mr. Spooner warned him, with deep sighs, to be guarded, very guarded, in his choice ; while Sir George openly demonstrated that, if he did marry, he would only be married for his money.

"I think I have a better opinion of myself than that," replied Summers, confidently.

"Hear!—hear!" had the squire replied.

"The vanity of the fellow!" said Sir George.

"No, I am not vain, I hope. When I do see a lady I could love, she shall be satisfied that I think more of her happiness than my own."

"And so add one more to the already overwhelming multitude of foolish and spoilt wives."

Captain Crabshawe was often permitted by his friends to make these sorts of little remarks, as it was charitably concluded that he had once had a disappointment, and that, in consequence, now "the grapes were sour."

But we must return to the dinner-room, where, long as we have been in describing the five friends, still the squire is frowning, still biting unconsciously the nail of his right hand thumb.

It is a most lovely evening. The windows are as wide open as windows can be. The soft evening air, so charming in the

early days of June, inflates those summer curtains with gentle zephyrs who seem to say, "Though you may not taint Mrs. Joscelyn's chintz with the fumes of tobacco, come out into the garden with us ; come to the arbour washed by the waves of the sea. We will play around you, and waft the little puffs of smoke emanating from your cigars, into little grotesque shapes. Or they shall assume an appearance suited to your thoughts, filling your minds with charming reflections on the past, the present, and the future. The sea shall sing her everlasting love-lay, murmuring it close in your ears—that love-song that the fair earth expands her bosom to receive. Close by is the hedge of sweet-brier ; we will hustle through the thorny branches, and waft about the fragrant perfume of its leaves, while the roses of June shall shed their sweet petals down to your feet."

In vain did the zephyrs sing thus. And why ? Mrs. Joscelyn had said almost the same thing, though of course in the matter-of-fact language of the day : "It will be just the evening," said she, "to enjoy smoking in the arbour."

All very fine, Mrs. Joscelyn, but the nerve opiniatum does not think it just the evening to do anything of the sort. The nerve opiniatum has a dining-room, and the nerve opiniatum does not see, when it has a dining-room, why it need smoke in an arbour, be that arbour ever so desirable.

So once more rose that harsh sound, half fretful, wholly tuneless—the voice of Captain Crabshawe.

"Ah, friends, let me tell you, where a man's comforts are really concerned, women are the very devil —"

"Hold ! hold ! Captain Crabshawe !" exclaimed Summers, startled out of his pleasing thoughts regarding the brown hat and blue veil by such a word applied to such beings.

"Come, Crabshawe, you are rather too strong ; Eliza—I mean Mrs. Joscelyn—is about as good a woman as ever lived."

"Granted, Squire, granted ; of course I don't expect to hear a man abuse his own property, of course not ; think what you like of her, Squire. I am not the man to contradict you, but at the same time I know Mrs. Joscelyn, I know her little arts, her wheedlings —"

"Pooh—pooh !" interrupted the squire, who was a little touchy on the point of supremacy in his household, as was natural in a man with the nerve opiniatum in active use. "Pooh—pooh ! a man is not a man or a gentleman, if he cannot give way to a woman's fid-fads when she desires it."

"Quite true, Squire!" exclaimed Mr. Frank all in a glow, "what would life be worth had we no opportunity to show our respect, our admiration, our devotion to the other sex."

"Respect! admiration! devotion! Ha!—ha! Summers, you are in love, my boy! Yes, Frank, I know it; don't deny it—you are a lost creature!"

"Poor Summers!" murmured Mr. Spooner, while Sir George laughed like a mocking-bird.

Mr. Summers sat down and blushed, as all four pair of eyes were turned full upon him. The squire good-naturedly relieved him from this embarrassing position by saying,

"I allow women sometimes take too much upon themselves——"

"Too much! Squire, by Heavens! they take all. Everything must give way to their fancies. Doors must be opened for them as if they were born without hands; chairs must be set for them, as if they had not the sense to sit down of their own accord; errands must be run for them, invented on purpose to suit the backs of those poor beasts of burden, those asses of men. Money must be found for them, let the husband and household starve, provided they are flounced up to the eyes, and smothered in gauze bonnets. Room must be made for them and their crinolines, until, by George! there is scarcely a corner left in the world for our poor spindle-shanks to bestow themselves."

And Captain Crabshaw thrust his out, which were that part of his person the least worth looking at. No one replied to this burst of eloquence; so, taking breath and courage, he dashed on again:

"Think what a world it would be without women! We should then have room to turn round. How we could go anywhere, and everywhere, without being smothered and upset by steel traps attached to inflated balloons; how much money we might save, which we could spend on sensible things—dogs, guns, horses, shooting moors, and a nice yacht, Squire—eh?" (The squire's ambition was a yacht.) "I contend that nothing binds us to women but motives of humanity; they are so weak, so frivolous, so generally incapable! that in sheer pity we live with them. But why need they make themselves abnoxious as well as troublesome? why interfere with our most trifling pleasures? why prevent us the most simple, harmless recreation of smoking?"

(Groans).

"Upon my word," continued the captain, roused by these groans of approbation into a lively flow of eloquence and

grand ideas, "what a thing it would be if we could give them a lesson, Squire. Let us go off for a while—let us leave them to themselves for a bit! Yes, Squire, let us show ourselves proof against their cajoleries—impervious to their attractions, Spooner—blind to their arts, Frank, my boy—wide-awake to their intentions, Follet—and more than all, Squire, independent of their presumed household virtues!"

"They are not presumed—Elizabeth is the best ——"

"We know it!—we know it! Pardon the interruption, Squire; but you see a man before you who is ready to do all that Mrs. Joscelyn ever did, and much more."

"Knit my socks, for instance!"

"Knit!—of course I can knit—any fool can knit; but who wants their socks knitted when you can buy them made by a loom that can neither drop stitches nor make mistakes, and for half the money too!"

"That is true," remarked Mr. Spooner.

Gratified by this show in his favour, the captain proceeded with increased vigour:—

"I will darn, mend, and sew on buttons, against any woman living. I say now, Squire, suppose, just to bring Mrs. Joscelyn to her bearings, to give her a lesson, we all took ourselves off for a time! I'll be bound you may smoke in the drawing-room, in her boudoir, in your very bed, when you return!"

"She wants a lesson of some sort," murmured the squire, as if to himself.

"I am not sure if a short absence, a want of my manly attentions," here Mr. Spooner drew out his left whisker, as a proof of his possessing one attribute of man, "would not be beneficial to Mrs. Spooner."

"I am positive I must be off somewhere," said Sir George; "for if I stay much longer that little Kate Daintree will wheedle me into so serious a flirtation, I shall find myself noosed before I am aware. I don't see how I shall like that!"

"Then we can rescue Summers," exclaimed the captain, with a frosty attempt at being jovial.

"So we can," they all exclaimed, fixing once more their full gaze upon that modest, unassuming young man.

Again he blushed to the very roots of his hair, as they all again assured him separately and together, with great heartiness and enthusiasm, that they would do anything for his good.

He murmured a few words, they might be thanks, but, to

judge by his countenance, it was much as if he was thanking some doctor for skilfully taken off his leg.

He might be grateful, but it was a gratitude of a very dubious kind.

Nevertheless, they were pleased with it ; in fact, it was more than they expected.

They had all made up their minds to fall into Captain Crabshawe's scheme, but at the same time they were all more or less twitted in their consciences that they should adopt it merely because they had not been allowed to smoke in Mrs. Joscelyn's dining-room. There was something rather pettish, not to say silly, in men of their brain and capacity, "Lords of the Creation," being moved to such an exhibition of temper, as all to leave home because they were not allowed to smoke !

The nerve opiniatum in vain protested to the squire it was reason sufficient. It is a well-known fact that this nerve can rarely be roused by a man in a man. Touched by Mrs. Joscelyn, it would have led the squire by the nose ; she being absent, it was again becoming dormant. The squire desired to give his wife a lesson, yet he did not desire to be thought a fool in doing so !

So it is probable that Captain Crabshawe's eloquence would all have been wasted but for the lucky thought of rescuing the amiable Frank.

"I am afraid, my dear boy," said the squire, "that if the object of your affections is the young lady I suspect, you would do well to avoid her ; she has a temper."

"Don't mince the matter, Squire. It is Clara Severn—and hasn't she a temper !"

"Miss Severn !" exclaimed Mr. Summers indignantly.

"Well, Miss Severn, since you are so particular," admitted Captain Crabshawe. "I saw you only yesterday sitting at the Battery Rock with her, and unable to see a single thing in the world beyond the rim of her brown hat."

Too true ! Had he not been thinking of that brown hat all the evening ? As he remembered the vision seen beneath the brown hat, he forgot to answer, he forgot where he was, he was lost in the remembrance of everything but that delicious hour.

When he awoke again to what was going on round him, he heard the squire saying,

"I don't wish to go far. There is my darling little Bessie, and if Eliz—Mrs. Joscelyn, should be ill ——"

"I will do Mrs. Joscelyn the justice to say, I never heard of her ailing, even a finger ache."

"True, Crab, she is without exception the best—or rather, I mean—I think Spooner's idea a very good one. Let us start to-morrow."

"I don't intend to go," said Frank, aghast at finding matters so far settled.

"Summers ! Frank !" exclaimed one and all ; "why, we are going solely for your good !"

"I don't care—I mean to stop at home. I am not offended about the smoking—I am very glad we were forbidden to smoke ; I don't care if I never smoke again."

The gentlemen looked at their beloved Frank, and at each other, in dismay. They were becoming fast smitten with the scheme, and could not bear the thought of relinquishing it.

"Come, Frank, don't be unkind, we merely wish to give my wife a lesson."

"She does not require a lesson, she is the best wife I ever saw, Squire. I wonder you can bear to think of living a day without her."

The squire was evidently gratified, but he was consequently the more determined to have his own way. The nerve opium was rising again.

"We propose," said Mr. Spooner, mellifluously, "only to go to one of the islands, my dear Frank, just for a short time. You see ladies will become arbitrary, they must have a gentle lesson now and then."

"I must go," interrupted Sir George ; "I wish to be somewhere for a time, where I can breathe and feel safe."

"Don't desert us, Summers ; you can surely trust me to do nothing unkind. I merely wish to go into the drawing-room, and say 'Elizabeth, here is a cheque for fifty pounds. I am going off for a month, I don't know where, and I don't care.'"

"Squire, dear Mr. Joscelyn, you are hurt, vexed. Wait until to-morrow. Sleep over the thought."

"No, Frank, I won't. I am a man of decision. I have passed my word to Crabshawe, and I am going to keep it."

"So have I."

"And I."

As Mr. Spooner and Sir George endorsed the squire's promise, Captain Crabshawe blew his nose sonorously. It was the trumpet of victory.

"You will be so miserable, Mr. Joscelyn."

"How do you make that out? Crabshawe, which island shall we choose?"

"We can hire any one of the three, and there are houses on each," he answered.

"I vote for the one furthest off," said Sir George.

"That is Ribble, and has the lighthouse on it."

"You will all be miserable," again said Summers.

"No, no, come with us, or you will be the one to be pitied. Taken possession of by Clara Severn."

"Captain Crabshawe!"

"I beg your pardon—Miss Severn. Fifteen miles of water between you and Miss Severn will be the saving of you. Don't be angry now. I am a man who must have his joke." (Very dull, lugubrious jokes were those of Captain Crabshawe.)

"Come with us, Summers, we only wish to show the ladies we can live without them."

"I don't think I can live without them."

"He is lost!" exclaimed Sir George.

"Undone!" sighed Mr. Spooner.

"I give him up!" said the captain.

"I will agree to accompany you on one condition," said Frank, moved by their various complaints.

"Name it—name it—anything to secure you."

"Give me leave to think over it until to-morrow."

"We must allow him this," said the squire.

"I have done with him," responded the captain, with an attempt at the heroic mood. "If he cannot see what we all see, why, he had better stay at home—we shall do better without him."

"Tea has been announced three times," said Mr. Summers, as if anxious to put an end to the struggle for his company—"surely we had better go to the ladies."

"There is no need for us to attend their summons sooner than we like. If they are unhappy, it is no more than their due —"

The door having been opened by Mr. Summers in his anxiety, there suddenly penetrated into the room a chorus of merry laughter. The squire stopped short in his speech. The ladies appeared to be enjoying themselves, when, in truth, they ought to have been just the reverse.

"I shall go and tell Elizabeth," urged the nerve opinitum in the squire.

Dear reader, let us get there first.



CHAPTER II.

HOW THE CLOUD INCREASED, AND THE CHALLENGE WAS ABSOLUTELY EXCHANGED AND ACCEPTED BETWEEN THE "LORDS" AND THE "LADIES."

THERE were five ladies in the drawing-room, as there were five gentlemen in the dining-room.

Mrs. Joscelyn had a peculiar talent for arranging a party. She not only managed always to secure a sufficiency of gentlemen (an Herculean task in most country places), but she knew the magic number ten enabled a lady and gentleman to sit alternately next each other all round the table—whereas eight or twelve, with the lady of the house seated at the head of her table, necessitated two of the same sex to sit side by side. Therefore ten was her usual number for a sociable, lively, and enjoyable dinner-party.

To say that the dinner itself was always of the kind to promote these feelings is unnecessary. when we remember who was at the head of the establishment. The squire, with his nerve opiniatum riding in full triumph over his entire personal structure, had vouched for the fact; while Captain Crabshawe, in a chronic state of bilious ill-temper, had been known to smile through its worst phases, when asked to dine at Deepcliffs.

The drawing-room was one of those lovely, fragrant, elegant bowers that at the very first glimpse told the male intruder it was sacred to women, and women only, and they were only admitted on protest. It was filled with beautiful things, arranged with exquisite taste. It was not very large or very lofty, but it had little ins and outs—one embayed window, the very bower for a flirtation; two others, large, wide, open, looking out on the sea, now silvered with moonbeams.

There were little statuettes ; there were brackets on the wall ; there was a sprinkling of rare china ; there were books in every direction ; there were mirrors here and there—a confiding clock, ticking with gentle music ; chairs of a luxurious, unique, inviting shape ; sofas in quiet corners, plants in pots placed anywhere — some with fragrant blossoms, others with a glorious display of verdant leaves ; there were small tables, with accommodation for two—a settee just suited for a few girls to lounge on in happy graceful idleness—in short, this room, as said before, was a perfect ladies' bower. And though it appeared arranged without the slightest art, not a thing could be displaced that was bettered by it. Mrs. Joscelyn, a little proud, as we have acknowledged, of her house, was, no doubt, a little vain of her drawing-room. Everybody exclaimed, who entered it for the first time—" Oh ! what a lovely, what a delicious, what a dear room ! "

And now we must describe the mistress of it. She is worthy of the room—without being a marvellous beauty, she has the sweetest face anyone could desire to look at. Her brown eyes looked frankly, genially, kindly into yours. Her brown hair, a shade lighter than her eyes, rippled all over in lights and shadows, and was gathered behind into great thick plaits, that, circling her head, crowned her like a queen. She was tall, slight, and graceful. There was nothing so conspicuous about her as to strike immediately, beyond the genial warmth of her greeting, but insensibly you liked the more you looked. New graces broke out in her every time she moved or spoke, demanding fresh praises from you, until, at last, no one knew Mrs. Joscelyn without loving her heartily.

She is knitting, silently, rapidly—knitting one of the squire's socks ; she does not look at her knitting, but is watching three girls grouped on the settee, who are gazing at the moonbeams kissing the little waves, as they rise up one after another, pouting out their round lips, and disappearing as rapidly as they come up.

Not far from her sits unmistakably the female A. S. As there was nothing remarkable about her spouse, so there is nothing remarkable about her, unless it be that the gaiety of her dress but ill accords with the melancholy of her countenance.

She has been sighing heavily and profoundly, so as to cause the ribbons of her cap (she thinks it dignified to wear a cap), gathered into a sort of crowd on the top of her head, to

quiver and rise like the crest of a lively cockatoo. Never still, her rich silk dress is in an incessant state of rustle, and the tinkling of all sorts of jewelry accompanies the sound. The ribbons of her cap are pink, the prevailing colour of her dress is blue, and she has hustled on to her shoulders a sort of yellow shawl or scarf. Thus there is no lack of colour about her, except in her face.

Of the three girls on the settee, one soon discovers herself to be still so much of a child as to wear short frocks, but which of the two is that she who owns a brown straw hat and a blue veil? or that other she who is so determinately anxious to become Lady Follett?

Let the reader guess.

The elder of the two has a fair face, set in a frame of raven dark hair. There is intellect and power expressed in her brow, determination and character in her well-developed mouth and chin. She is beautifully made. No sculptor could desire a better model—no painter could wish for more dignity and grace. Doubtless there was a certain disdain, a haughtiness, a sort of cold indifference in her very attitude as she reclined there looking out at the moon, but her companion whispered something to her, a smile illuminated her face, a blush rose to her cheek—she became at once human and loveable.

As for that companion, she was a little dainty creature; she was like all the rosebuds in the garden. She was wilful, too, showing thorns as they did; she pouted her lip, then she laughed, anon she was imperious, again coaxing—together, she was everything in a minute, and pretty in all.

"Gossip," she had whispered, "you are in love."

"Poor child!" answered gossip.

"You are—I declare you are! I wish I could love."

And the little thing looked overpoweringly pathetic.

"Wish what, my dear?" asked Mrs. Joscelyn, roused from her thoughts and her knitting by the earnestness of the wish.

"That I could love."

"Ah! my dearest girl, wish nothing so fatal. Pray—pray for the coldest heart, the hardest nature. To love is to be—miserable."

It is needless to say that this sentence was spoken by the female A. S., whose cap fluttered up into ribbons, whose dress seemed to rustle out small groans, and whose bracelets and ear-rings rang out little tinkles of warning.

"I think so differently from you, Arabella," observed Mrs.

Joscelyn ; " I consider it the duty of everybody to fall in love once in their lives. It does them a great deal of good, whether the love ends well or ill."

"Gracious heavens ! Mrs. Joscelyn, do my ears deceive me ?"

"I hope not. Bessie, my dear, I think you must go to bed, the gentlemen don't seem inclined to come in to tea, and it is past nine o'clock."

"But, mamma, I have not wished papa good-night."

"Give me his kiss, love, and he shall have it when he comes in."

Miss Bessie was not proof against that power which Mrs. Joscelyn seemed to possess over everyone who came near her, namely, to obey her ; she paid her adieux, gave her mother half-a-dozen kisses for herself and one for her father, saying,

"He deserves no more for being so late," and immediately took her departure.

As if about to witness a duel of words between the two elder ladies, the younger ones turned to join them.

"I repeat what I said before. I add, moreover, that there is no sight more pleasant to me than to see a young couple seriously, happily, and devoutly in love with each other."

"Ah ! I can remember such a time occurring to me—remember ! it requires no remembrance ! it was but as yesterday, and now —"

"Now you are happily married, and to go on love-making would be simply nonsensical. I love my husband with quite as much fervour as any wife with whom I am acquainted, yet to be perpetually showing it would seriously inconvenience, I may say, annoy him, and make people regard me as more fond than wise."

"And why should such a false state of things exist ? Augustus is—was—everything to me. The whole world were welcome to see my devotion to him ; the whole world might know I cared nothing for all within it had I but him. And yet you would have me believe that such love as mine, expressed with only half its fervour, would annoy him, and make me look ridiculous."

"I agree with my aunt," said the least of the two maidens ; "when I love, if ever I love, no one shall see any signs of it but he."

"He !" laughed her gossip—"is not he Sir George Follett ?"

"By no means, gossip. I must, before I love at all, have

some one who will love me, and not himself. Now, charming as I think myself, I have not yet arrived at that consummation of vanity, as to suppose that the person you have named thinks of me in preference to himself!"

"I think you are hard on Sir George, little pet! I consider he has a good heart."

"Oh! you think well of everybody, dear Aunt Elizabeth, and have such kind eyes, they discover virtues where we see only defects. If that gentleman has a heart, which is what I have never been able to discover, I am glad you approve of it."

"I consider him utterly selfish and vain, like all men."

"Now, I rise up, Mrs. Spooner, and say, not all men."

"Clara, you blush as you say it—poor girl! poor, poor girl! you are like a moth fluttering about the candle."

"She has not burnt her wings yet, neither shall she while I am by!" exclaimed the little one, hotly.

"Or I either," added Mrs. Joscelyn. "Come, Clara, let us put you on a confessional. You have now been with me two months, during which time I have seen you the object of much attention from one person. Indeed, so much so, that your names are being coupled together. I have observed that lately you are looking a little anxious—is there anything I can do, as I would for my little Bessie, that may end the matter one way or the other?"

"No, my kind friend, nothing. If I have looked anxious, it is more because I feel that a crisis is impending over me——"

"Avoid it, Clara—don't be tempted. Amiable as Mr. Summers is, men are all deceivers ever?"

"I throw down my glove for him!" exclaimed the rosebud; "he has but one fault—he is too diffident."

"There are one or two causes for that," said Mrs. Joscelyn; "the first one, I think, proceeds from Clara herself; she is a little shy and proud."

"It is true—I feel so. The more I am interested, the less I show it. An orphan so long, left so much to myself, every thought repressed rather than encouraged, I hardly knew what it was to express any feeling until I lived with you all."

"This makes Mr. Summers, though he has long ago made up his mind as to his own feelings, hang back a little, so that you may have ample time to probe your heart."

"No," interrupted Mrs. Spooner, "it is not that; it is that odious Crabshawe—Crabshawe is the ruin of all the young

bachelors about the place, and the destruction of all the married men."

"You credit him with a vast deal more power than I do," said Mrs. Joscelyn.

"I scarcely think I would stoop to enter the lists with him," remarked Clara, assuming her most disdainful air.

"I have been thinking it would amuse me to get up a flirtation with Captain Crabshawe," observed Kate.

"By way of making Sir George jealous, Kate?"

"That would be fun! But I will tell you what would annoy Sir George the most, and that is, for all of us to go away, and leave him to the tender mercies of Captain Crabshawe."

"Let us go to one of the islands out there, looking so lovely in the moonlight. Will you take me and my little gossip, Mrs. Joscelyn?"

"Ah! how exquisite!—do consent, my dear friend, and let me accompany you. Away from Augustus, he might remember other days, and happier times, and repent ——"

"You do not any of you know what you are talking about. Not a quarter of an hour ago, Arabella, you were sighing and bewailing because the gentlemen were so long in the dining-room. Clara has all but acknowledged she is in love, and Katie is dying to get Captain Crabshawe into a flirtation, and yet you have all the conscience to ask me to carry you off to an island, away from them. However, I consent. You will beseech me to bring you back in two days."

"No, we will promise to stay a whole week, Aunt Elizabeth; I think it will do the gentlemen good to lose us for a while. There is my uncle. Fond as I am of him, oh! my goodness me! how he scowled as we all left the dinner-room."

"That was because I begged them not to smoke; I ought to have asked him privately and not before his company."

"And would you really humour him as much as that, Mrs. Joscelyn? As a gentleman, he ought to have submitted at once. I daresay that is why they remain so long in the dinner-room; Augustus is always ready to take the part of a man against his wife!"

"And Captain Crabshawe is not behind-hand. Gossip, suppose Mr. Summers ——"

"I will suppose nothing, Kate. Mr. Summers has not committed himself with me, and is still free to choose whichever society pleases him best."

"There's a moth with singed wings for you, Mrs. Spooner—

she is not hurt yet ! But, seriously, dearest, sweetest, kindest auntie, what fun it would be to leave them all ! ”

“ You are a little monkey, how can I oblige you ? My husband would not bear his home for a day without me ; not that I say so out of vanity, but it is absolutely necessary to his happiness that he should have some one to call to, to shout at, to consult with, to scold, or to pet ; to joke with, to confide in—in fact, he is so gregarious, he can do nothing unless he has some one to see him do it, or to help him.”

“ He can have Captain Crabshawe.”

“ I wish you would consent, I want to give Augustus a lesson.”

“ I really can hardly help laughing at the notion. How astonished they would look ! ”

“ Ha ! ha ! ” laughed all the ladies ; and as we know, dear reader, at a most unpropitious moment for their ill-timed hilarity, made itself heard in the dinner-room. Before it had well ceased, the squire, followed by all the gentlemen, made his tardy appearance in the drawing-room ; the frown on his face having a marked character of indignation about it, which was equally the characteristic of the expression of three others.

Mrs. Joscelyn was usually a woman of much tact, but this evening, not aware how seriously she had offended—something hurt in her turn at their long absence, yet also merry in her heart at the island notion—she took no heed to frowns or signs.

“ John,” she said flippantly, yes, flippantly, if such a word can be applied to her, “ little Bessie has gone to bed, and sent you this.”

And she blew him a kiss, with an air the most nonchalant that can be conceived.

The nerve opiniatum quivered from head to heel. So sudden and sharp was its spring into action, that for a time speech was denied the squire. Not that he had expected to find the ladies in tears, though they ought to have been, considering all things, but accustomed to feel that their manly wishes were the barometer that should control them—having implicit faith in that mysterious sort of perception that the female mind knew exactly when to be merry or when to be sad, when to take liberties or be submissive, when to reign rampant or humbly obey—it was astonishing the effect of this laughter, this “ deuce-may-care,” this audacious blowing of kisses. It was just as if he was mocked !

Now it is well understood by all those wise people who

have been at infinite pains to make psychological discoveries, who have penetrated into the makings of man, sounded the depths of his mind, the weight of his brain, and arranged his bumps in an artistic and praiseworthy order—who have sound reasons to give for certain syllogisms that crop up in man's daily deeds and doings, and have an infinite variety of examples ready to prove all the learned and inexplicable things they have written on the subject—all these wise people have made all these discoveries with the simple purpose of assuring us that there is a vast difference, mentally and personally, between a male and female biped.

We were pretty sure of this before, partly owing to common personal observation, but still it is highly satisfactory to have the testimony of such learned people to corroborate us in the idea that a man is always serious in whatever he undertakes, while a woman is never serious until a man makes her so.

Thus as we, dear reader, know, the gentlemen had discussed their grievances with a gravity and power of thought worthy the occasion, while the ladies had lightly laughed and gossiped, heedless of the signs of the times.

The gentlemen had entered the drawing-room big with the important subject of their discussion, the ladies were tittering and giggling over the frivolity of theirs, utterly regardless of a precipice before them.

It is needless to say, they brought their own fate upon themselves; at the same time, they must be excused as they did not know they had seriously offended.

Meantime the squire is about to speak.

What æsthetical law prompted him to say the words he did, or how psychologists can account for the connection in his mind between what he said and what he thought, I leave them to define; but what he did say was—and in rather a strong rude voice,

“I won't drink cold tea.”

“This is just made for you, John; ours had been made an hour.”

It was prettily said, accompanied by a pretty look—part surprise that he could think she would give him cold tea, and part reproof that he should speak so loud in her drawing-room.

The squire was a just man; he felt her surprise was pardonable, she had never as yet given him cold tea, and he ought to have waited until she had done so to find fault. But her reproof—what right had she to dictate to him how he was to speak? Was he to have no peace anywhere in his own house?

Not allowed to smoke in his own dining-room, ordered to modulate his voice to a certain pitch in his own drawing-room—he had better not live in the house at all, if he was to be bullied and badgered at every turn.

“Mrs. Joscelyn, I am going away to-morrow—alone.”

“Are you, John?” says she—(pause, Mrs. Joscelyn, everything hangs upon these unspoken words of yours ; she doesn’t pause, woman-like she dashes on)—“we were just talking of the same thing.”

And, still amused in her mind at the idea, Mrs. Joscelyn accompanied these words with a smile.

Perhaps the words might have been forgiven, but the smile never. For when Mrs. Joscelyn did smile, it was by no means a furtive affair—she smiled with her lips, her eyes, whole face, dimples coming and going according to the force of the smile.

The die was cast. From that moment the nerve opiniatum gained entire possession of the squire, and reason, precaution, and prudence vacated their thrones.

We will leave Mr. and Mrs. Joscelyn to fight it out, and place ourselves behind the sofa occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Spooner.

Mrs. A. S.—“I hope you have enjoyed each other’s company ; one would suppose you cared for none other, by the length of time you have been in the dining-room.”

Mr. A. S.—“We were discussing a most important matter.”

Mrs. A. S.—“No doubt—the price of cigars, or who could smoke the greatest number.”

Mr. A. S.—“I assure you, Arabella —”

Mrs. A. S.—“Arabella, indeed ! I remember the time when it was Belle—my Belle —”

Mr. A. S.—“Well, Belle, my love, it had nothing to do with cigars.”

He paused, conscious that he was unconsciously telling a fib.

Mrs. A. S.—“Oh ! don’t tell me—something equally foolish ; hunting, perhaps—or the difference between a brown and a bay horse.”

Mr. A. S.—“Not horses at all, dear Belle.”

Mrs. A. S.—“The fight, then ; and you call yourself a gentleman ! Oh ! Augustus, it is all that Captain Crabshawe—he began to talk to me about Heavite and Sting.”

Mr. A. S. (laughing)—“Heenan and King, my dear love.”
The term of endearment was lost in the laugh. Like the

squire, ridicule cut into her mental organisation as a knife into her bodily frame.

Mrs. A. S.—“Don’t mock me, Sir. I thank goodness I am not acquainted with any of your fisti-cuffers.”

Mr. A. S.—“I thank goodness, too—I don’t wish you to know them even by name.”

Mrs. A. S. (mollified)—“Then may I ask what kept you so long in the dinner-room?”

The question thus clearly put, Mr. Spooner felt puzzled to answer. Like men of his stamp, worthy good creatures, and invaluable in their way, as are the fleecy flock, he did not see why he should take upon his mild, peaceful shoulders the onus of the present state of affairs. There were some big cattle grazing in his meadow, especially a noble bull, capable of bearing any amount of burden.

Mr. A. S.—“It was the squire; he was not pleased about—about the smoking, you know, Belle.”

Mrs. A. S.—“As if any fool could not see that! He frowned on Mrs. Joscelyn like an ogre.”

Mr. A. S.—“So we stayed longer than we should have done.”

Mrs. A. S.—“Of course! not that we wanted you—we were very happy without you—indeed, so happy, that we think of going away—of leaving you, of living by ourselves awhile.”

Mr. A. S.—(alarmingly astonished).—“Why, Arabella?”

Mrs. A. S.—“Don’t Arabella me, Sir!”

Mr. A. S.—“But Arabella ——”

Mrs. A. S.—“Will you insult me?”

Mr. A. S.—“By heavens, Arabella!”

Mrs. A. S.—(in her turn alarmingly astonished).—“Augustus, you have been drinking too much wine!”

Mr. A. S.—“And you have been listening at the dinner-room door.”

Let us draw a veil over the rest of this conversation. In the first place, ’tis not manners to listen to a matrimonial squabble; and in the second place, we can perfectly guess what ensued.

Five people are seated on or near the settee, close to an open window. Miss Daintree and Sir George nearly *dos-à-dos*. Miss Severn on a little stool just outside the window; Captain Crabshawe standing up before them both, his arm firmly linked in the arm of Mr. Summers. It required no effort of the imagination to conjecture that Captain Crabshawe had a mutinous subject by the arm, and meant to hold fast on to

him, dangerous enemies being in sight. These dangerous enemies he resolved to do battle with at once.

"We are afraid, really, that our presence causes you some annoyance, ladies."

"People are not usually annoyed at nothing, Captain Crabshawe."

"Ah, well, Miss Daintree," continued her unconscious victim; "I am glad you have the justice to own it is nothing, though, of course, you cannot expect us to be of the same opinion. Let me tell you, 'tis no joke to thwart a man—a man is a being, Miss Daintree, who loves and has a right to have his own way. A man likes quiet, peace, wom —"

"And a place to smoke in," interrupted Miss Daintree.

"Very good—very good—I am glad you allow that, though, unfortunately, all are not of your opinion. And because all are not of your opinion, we think of going away—leaving you."

"Oh! how nice!—Clara, do you hear? now we can go to one of the islands by ourselves."

"But we are going to the islands."

"You cannot live on all of them at once. There is the Ribble, and Puff, and Luff, besides the little Nid."

"But why do you want to go to an island?"

"To be somewhere out of the way of the smell of tobacco."

Hardly believing his ears, and infinitely puzzled as to the extraordinary fact that the ladies had been planning a scheme, the counterpart of that of the gentlemen, Captain Crabshawe inadvertently let go the arm of his prisoner, and sat down by Miss Daintree to get this mysterious matter explained.

"That's a dear creature—come and sit by me, and we will have ever so much of an argument."

More wonderment still—she had called him a "dear." He did not ever remember to have been so affectionately addressed before. The sensation was pleasant, decidedly pleasant—he would like to hear it again.

"Anything to please you, Miss Daintree?"

"Good gracious! turn your face round—was it Captain Crabshawe that spoke? It is—well! wonders will never cease!"

"Is there anything odd in what I have said?"

"Oh, dear, yes! it is so odd that you should have said a civil thing to a woman—nobody will believe me if I tell them; they will say I am the vainest little creature."

"Then they will say what is untrue. As far as I know to the contrary, I should say, Miss Daintree, you had as little vanity as any woman I know."

"That is not saying much, considering how you hate our sex—but thank you all the same, Captain Crabshawe."

"She might have said 'dear,'" thought that worthy to himself; "she is a pretty little thing—I don't think Follett is worthy of her."

"Can't you make room for me in front, Crab," asked that young gentleman in an aggrieved tone.

"Oh! dear no, Sir George, my crinoline wants the room of three, and Captain Crabshawe has not over-much to spare. Have you, now?"

"What a fool the girl is!" thought Sir George.

"Nice little thing," thought the captain, "she prefers me."

When vanity assails a man, he has the disease worse than any female. With his odd shaped head spinning with unusual sensations, and his whole soul bent upon making pretty little Miss Daintree call him "dear" again, Captain Crabshawe was wholly oblivious to the escape of his prisoner, and the disappearance simultaneously of Miss Severn.

"Now tell me all about it—are you all going to the island, and how long shall you stay there?"

"Yes, Miss Daintree, I am happy to say we are unanimous—we all go, and we mean to stay at least a month!"

"Only a month! I hope Aunt Elizabeth will not think it necessary to come home because my uncle does."

"Miss Daintree, are you serious in your intentions to go to an island?" asked Sir George.

"Yes, to the full as serious as you."

"You will be bored."

"Pardon me, you will be bored."

"How?—how? Now, Miss Daintree, how do you make that out?"

"Well, Captain Crabshawe, who is to mend your gloves?"

"I shall."

"Sew on your buttons?"

"I will sew on buttons against any woman living."

"Order your dinners?"

"Pooh!—pooh! do you think we are fools?"

"Keep your house tidy?"

"There is not a woman living so tidy as me."

"But still you will be dull; you will have no one to scold, no one to quarrel with."

"That's the very reason we go—we men love peace and quiet—we will give up everything to have that comfort."

"And unlimited smoking. Well, but, Captain Crabshawe, let you and me be serious. I will make a bet with you. If we go to one island, and you to another, I will bet you a new hat to a new bonnet, that you not only tire of it the soonest, but that you quarrel the most."

"That is my opinion," said Mrs. Joscelyn, coming forward.

"And mine," sighed Mrs. Spooner, emerging from a corner with rather red eyes.

The squire uttered a wrathful "Pooh ! pooh !"

Captain Crabshawe burst into an indignant denial.

Mr. Spooner bridled and tried to be angry ; while Sir George seized the only opportunity he had, and whispered over the settee—

"Miss Daintree, oblige me, don't go to this island," and then he drew back, absolutely shuddering at the rashness of his proceeding. If she did oblige him, he should have, he supposed, to make her an offer. There was no escape for him. Yes—he is saved.

"It is very wicked of me, Sir George, but I am so fond of obliging myself. And besides, this is my scheme—mine was the brilliant idea. But come, Captain Crabshawe, is it a bargain ? You have not accepted my bet."

"Miss Daintree, I am willing to stake one hundred pounds on the trial."

"How nice !—what shall I buy with that hundred pounds ? Something pretty for you, certainly, Captain Crabshawe. One of the new fashionable ties ; or a dozen bottles of eau-de-cologne, or perhaps a ring. It is but fair you should have your choice."

Naughty little creature ! It is hard to say which she enjoyed most—befooling the captain, or ignoring the baronet—but, as she said afterwards, "It was all for your sake, gossip. Naturally, I am not such a little wretch."

And so thus it came about that the nerve opiniatum of the squire, the ill-temper of Captain Crabshawe, the spleen of Mr. Spooner, and the fear of Sir George, gained the day.

The ladies had much in their power at one time, if they could but have seen their advantage, and profited by it. But Mrs. Joscelyn suffered the favourable moment to pass, and no other was given her.

It now became a Babel of protestations on both sides, as to which party was the most in earnest.

"I want to be off to-morrow," growled the squire.

"That can't be," said Mr. Spooner, "we must go to Rampton, to the agent, and hire the island; I know him, and will undertake that business."

"Will you hire the other for us?" asked Mrs. Joscelyn.

"Certainly, Madam; which is it you wish to have?"

"It would not be fair for either of us to go to Ribble, as there are inhabitants on it. There is no house on Nid, so the choice remains between Puff and Luff."

"Oh, dear aunt! of course the gentlemen must take Puff. It's very name is suggestive."

"Are the houses equally good on both?"

"Luff has the most comfortable one."

"Then, Elizabeth, you shall have Luff for your party."

"Thank you, my dear John, it shall be so."

"But how far are the islands apart?" asked Captain Crabshawe, anxiously; "we must not be too near."

"Three miles."

"You must promise, Mrs. Joscelyn, not to come over to our island, on any pretence."

"Oh, Captain Crabshawe! suppose you should be ill and want a nurse?"

"Well, Miss Daintree, I have been ill before now, and, thank God, I was able to nurse myself well again. By-the-bye, where's Summers? Frank, Frank! where are you?"

"Here!" said the amiable Frank, looking in from the window; "I have been listening with the utmost attention to this Babel of tongues."

"Then of course you know what is settled; of course your mind is made up—you accompany us. You wouldn't flinch now?"

"Flinch! no indeed! I am ready to go to-morrow."

"Humty tum ti ti!" murmured the captain.

"Do you sing, Captain Crabshawe?" interrupted the little rosc-bud.

"No, Miss Daintree! But can you tell me where Miss Severn has vanished to?"

"She has probably gone to bed; you know it was almost ten o'clock before you came into the drawing-room. Then you have had tea, and I have been flirting with you ever since."

Flirting! a grim smile came to Captain Crabshawe's puckered mouth, which broke out into a sort of a horse chuckle as he looked at Sir George.

"Follet is jealous," thought he, "and Frank has been

snubbed—Miss Severn has shown her tempers ; so much the better, we shall be all the merrier on the island.”

“I think,” said Mr. Spooner, touched by his wife’s red eyes, “we had almost better settle no more to-night, but sleep over the thought. Probably we shall all think differently in the morning !”

A torrent of invectives flew about his head for the insinuation.

“I go, if no one else does !” said the squire.

“Our honour is concerned,” added his wife ; “we feel that somehow, unintentionally, we have offended you. Good gentlemen, for this we ask pardon, as befits dutiful wives and submissive young damsels. But as to giving up our challenge, as to supposing that we are unable to live without the company of your—your esteemed sex, we insist upon being put to the proof.”

“It is not so much that, Madam—I daresay you might contrive to get on very well without us, for a time ; but I contend that we are independent of you altogether. In fact, Madam, to speak plainly, a woman is a tax upon a man’s time, patience, and peace of mind. They may be luxuries, but they are useless and expensive ?”

“If such are your feelings, Captain Crabshawe, and if they are responded to by the rest of the gentlemen, we can but promise you the utmost expedition in releasing you from the annoyance of our society. To-day is Wednesday ; Mrs. Spooner, may I answer for you, as well as myself and the girls, we shall be ready to start on Monday ?”

“Sooner if you can, Mrs. Joscelyn,” responded Mrs. Spooner, in a voice that could not make up its mind whether it would be a cry or a sob.

“Not until Monday ?” exclaimed one or two, in disappointed tones.

“No, we do not intend to live like savages. I must have the house cleaned and aired.”

“There, Squire, do you hear ? Thank heavens, we are independent of any such nonsense !”

“Still, Crabshawe, we have enough to do. Let us all at once agree to say Monday ; we shall find the time little enough,” remonstrated Mr. Spooner.



CHAPTER III.

HOW THE CLOUD OF SMOKE GRADUALLY ENVELOPES OUR
HEROES AND HEROINES FROM ALL EYES BUT THOSE OF
THE READER AND WRITER.



THE writer being, as he hopes, on the best of terms with his reader, the latter will not think it necessary for the former to enter into any detail of the awakening feelings of the Puffs and Luffs (as we may now call them) on the following morning. It is enough to say, that several of them repented the bargain made the evening before with such vehemence, that one or two were openly heard to say "that they were all mad together, or silly as children," which latter state was more humiliating than the former. Probably the whole scheme would have fallen to the ground, spite of Captain Crabshawe's powerful appeals, had it not been that he was backed up by the squire, and absolutely encouraged by no less a person than Mr. Summers. Yes, Mr. Frank Summers appeared the next morning at Deep-Cliffs; but we ought to describe Deep-Cliffs, and how it was situated, and why so many Puffs and Luffs met there, and all such particulars, which, without being parts of the story, are yet necessary to the filling-up of the picture, making that truthful and natural which, under careless handling, would have all the appearance of improbability and romance.

Deep-Cliffs was the name of the house in which the Joscelyns had spent every summer since they married. It was their own property—purchased with part of the money Mrs. Joscelyn brought to her husband as her fortune. Mr. Joscelyn's own paternal home was situated fifty miles further inland, but in what county the reader is considerably allowed to fix for himself.

Deep-Cliffs was situated on the coast, which coast of

course the reader will be careful to remember is in the same county as the house and the town above mentioned. The scenery was grand and bold, in some parts romantically beautiful ; for deep dingles or ravines, nursing in their sheltered bosoms every tree and flower that Nature loves best, ran down to the beach, carrying with them little noisy, light-some brooks, that no sooner burst cheerily out into the wide world, than they were lost and submerged in the wider world of sea.

In the grounds belonging to Deep-Cliffs, which covered an extent of seven hundred acres, was a dingle rather larger and wider than most of them.

Here the trees grew to a forest size ; here the brook had to be spanned by bridges, and a winding carriage-road led from the house down to the sea, all through the dingle. The terminus was a small pleasure or boat-house, where Mr. Joscelyn kept one or two boats and a yawl. To launch these, he had built a small dock, into which the little brook ran with jocund impetuosity, confident that it had at last found a space wherein it could expand, and assume almost the importance of a lake—but, alas ! only to find itself dripping ignominiously away through a sluice—on—on—its sweet water lost in the brine of ocean.

The house of Deep-Cliffs was just the sort of house that ought to belong to Mrs. Joscelyn. They suited each other. She was an elegant woman—the house was an elegant house. She was cheery and warm-hearted—the house was sunny and sweet ; every door and every window generally in a hospitable state of wide-openness.

Nobody looked at Mrs. Joscelyn without feeling gratified in one way or another ; no one entered Deep-Cliffs without experiencing the delightful sensation of being at home. The inhabitants usually dwelling there are Mr. and Mrs. Joscelyn, two sons, now at school, one little girl, Bessie, the only being who leads the squire completely by the nose, seven male and female servants.

The visitors are Kate Daintree, that little flirt, niece to Mrs. Joscelyn ; her friend and gossip, Miss Clara Severn, the young lady suspiciously gifted with a temper.

These are staying in the house.

Spending the day, this important day, that gave birth to the Puffs and Luffs, are Mr. and Mrs. Spooner, who usually dwell in the neighbouring town of Rampton, where Mr. Spooner is the acting partner in the only bank, and so—a person of importance.

Captain Crabshawe, also a dweller in Rampton, but whereabouts he lives in it few of his friends know. It has been conjectured that he has lodgings in a house a short way from town, belonging to the nursery gardens. Again it is conjectured that he does not live there, but his mother does; and rumour is still further so unkind as to say that his mother is the wife of Jenkyns, the nurseryman and seedsman of the town of Rampton. But as the settling of this question has nothing to do with the Puffs and Luffs, with the reader's permission we will let it be. Should inquiries, which the writer will consider it his duty to make, prove that the question of Captain Crabshawe's having a mother, and that mother remarried to Jenkyns, nurseryman and seedsman, is a mother of whom he may be proud, notification shall be made of her history in an appendix; or perhaps, should such a fortuitous state of things occur as a second edition—but, tut! tut!—expectation plays the fool with many! and, in regard to authors, the maiden and her basket of eggs, the Arabian porter and his tray of crockery, are mild instances compared with the vagaries she makes them believe. But *revenons à nos Puffs*.

The whereabouts of Captain Crabshawe must remain a mystery—partly because the writer knows nothing about them, and partly because the revelation is of no consequence.

Very different from Sir George Follett. He is that fortunate young man who owns almost the whole of Rampton. He has the satisfaction of driving through a street called Follett Street, up to an hotel bearing the Follett arms. He sees a lane called George Lane, and the square is styled Castle Square, because Sir George's own house is a castle, and named Follett Castle.

Besides the town of Rampton, he owns half the county. He is Lord of the Manor, he has moors, he has mines, he has quarries, he has forests—in short, like the Marquis of Carabas, he has everything. So, upon the whole, we must not be surprised that he thinks every woman wants to marry him. It is very amiable of him that he holds out so long, so that the most dejected have still the satisfaction of "hoping."

He is very fond of the squire, and with very good reason, too. The squire, as we have seen, is one of those mettlesome gentlemen who will speak his mind. If he does not agree with an opinion expressed, he flatly contradicts, be the man who he may.

When the Lord-Lieutenant was about to make a man a magistrate who was of that species of character that he

might sit in judgment upon himself with quite as much justice as any criminal brought before him, was not Squire Joscelyn the only man who went boldly up and bearded him?

"My lord, if you make that man a magistrate, we will none of us sit on the bench with him."

"Then let him sit alone."

"My lord, I'll memorialise you. I shall go off to the Home-Secretary by the first train."

"Be quiet, Mr. Joscelyn; remember you are not in the hunting-field."

"A true hound is known by his yelp—I am in earnest."

"Then you have run your fox to earth, and your sport is over. I have no intention to make the person you name a magistrate."

"I beg your pardon, my lord. I have had a woo-whoop, and will not carry home the brush as a trophy. We have your promise."

And he got it.

It was because the squire was so honest and true that Sir George liked him. From him he always got the thought of his heart, and he could trust him almost better than his own rather weak wayward mind.

As for Mr. Summers, he was an eligible young bachelor, living in the town of Rampton. He had an independent fortune, but still, disliking idleness, he had undertaken the superintendence of the working of a mine leased out by Sir George to a company.

After his business was over he had an inveterate habit of taking his boat and rowing himself over to Deep-Cliff's Cove. Within the little lake, or pond or dock, he moored his vessel safely, as in expectation of storms, which storms he would invoke or pray for all the way as he ran up to Deep-Cliff's House. Not from a misanthropic state of mind, as regarded sailors and all their perils, but because he desired to be wind-bound at Deep-Cliff. To be sure, it was very selfish of him, but then 'tis but right to allow this disease had only attacked him lately. Two months before he had not shown even a symptom, though now it was so violent he was always praying for stormy weather, in the height of summer, after six o'clock. And here he is, showing the malady in another form. After almost quarrelling with all his friends over-night, he is now upholding Captain Crabshawe and the squire in all their crinks and cranks, seemingly as possessed by the nerve opium as they are.

Evidently Mr. Spooner would cry *peccavi*! on merely the hint, and Sir George has been even a little mutinous.

Again, my dear reader, I take you into my confidence. These two gentlemen—these two flat and degenerate Puffs—are regretting the “flesh-pots of Egypt.” Captain Crabshawe is holding forth on that fine, satisfying, and truthful couplet—or rather the sense of it, for he is innocent of knowing a line of poetry, or, indeed, why poetry is different from prose—

“Man wants but little here below,
Nor wants that little long,”

and they don't seem to agree with him. So far from wanting “little,” they require a great deal, and all the more because they can't have it “long.”

However, as the preparations go on they catch a little of the enthusiasm. Also the ladies keep up a perpetual taunting, until they are goaded into a sort of desperation, which acts the part of keeping them up to the mark.

Then there are a great many squabbles. They argue about servants, they disagree about having provisions; the gentlemen are nettled at the ladies providing themselves with a piano, and the ladies are huffed because the gentlemen will have the *Times* every day.

The squire thinks that his Elizabeth is much too cheerful, considering she is not only in his black books, but is going to leave him for a month; and though he is too proud to tell her, he has a perception that he will miss her most dreadfully, and it is her business, and not his, to say so. And there is his little Bessie—he has almost a mind to make her come with him.

“Oh! law, no, papa!” exclaimed Miss Bessie, as he half in fun mentioned his idea. “I dare not! Captain Crabshawe is going to poison every woman who comes near Puff.”

“But you are not a woman, Bessie.”

“That doesn't matter, papa, I wear petticoats.”

“Put on your brother's clothes, and come with me.”

“No, I thank you, papa. I am much too proud for that. I don't like men at all, excepting just you, papa; and I would rather be the smallest woman that ever lived, than the finest man that ever was born!”

“Bessie is true to her sex,” remarked her mother.

Mr. Spooner thinks his Arabella might at least return to

the fondness of their bridal days, as they are about to part for the first time since their marriage. While she is altogether so ruffled, so excited, so nervous, that she is as troublesome to the Puffs, as she is wearisome to the Luffs. She has no time to think of her Augustus and his claims upon her affections—she is in one perpetual worry as to what she shall take, and what she will leave behind—what she will really want, and what she can do without.

“Did you ever see such a woman !” had the captain remarked ; “the Lord be thanked !—on Monday there will be three miles of water between her and us !”

This was the real distance that was about to separate the Puffs from the Luffs, the Lords and the Ladies, for a month—a month being the time settled on for the challenge to be won or lost.

Sir George Follett is deeply grieved at the flighty, foolish conduct of Miss Daintree. So far from feeling, much less intimating, a little sorrow at the parting for so long (he feels himself it is much too long), she is singing all over the house, packing for everybody. When quiet at last, she is so busy making herself a cotton-dress for Luff duty, that she has no time to listen to him. He watches her, shaping out the dainty waist ; he marks the little earnest frown of anxiety, which gives her sweet little rose-bud face such a wise look ; he is quite in love with the way in which she smoothes her work, taps it ; the air with which she threads her needle, the intensity she puts into the making of a knot ; even that dreadful unlady-like trick of placing a pin between her lips—(in a hurry she wanted a third hand, so that must be her excuse) ; he found no fault with that—he did not think it dreadful or unlady-like—he only had a sort of longing to be that pin.

And then, one evening, when she went out alone, and he followed her—he scarcely knew why—he did not know what might be the consequence, but he followed her. He discovered her with Susan, the maid that was going with them to Luff. Susan was teaching her to milk Daisy, the cow ; how she laughed with glee—how she chatted to Susan of all they would do—of their happiness—their freedom—he hidden behind the great laurel ;—a great bitterness came into his heart.

“She is nothing but a silly child, not worth thinking about. In fact, she has no heart !”

As for Miss Severn, she seemed radiant with happiness, entering into all the packing and arrangements with

a spirit and thought that excited even the squire's admiration.

As for Frank, he was here, there, and everywhere—whistling, singing, laughing, joking, working harder than any of them, hearing of no compromise, comforting Spooner, and coaxing Follett. People might have supposed they were all going to Puff and Luff solely to oblige him.

"I say," said the captain, to any new friend, "a word in your ear. He has been refused, and is carrying off his disappointment with a high hand. Ha! ha! catch me ever being refused by a woman!"

Without entering into all the captain's feelings, Frank's friends agreed that such was his fate, such the reasons of his conduct. They admired him, they honoured him for it. It should be the endeavour of all, while at Puff, to pour balm into his wounded feelings.

And now came the final moment—the parting hour. It is needless to puzzle the reader with all the minutiae of their packings and arrangements; how the yawl went to and fro, with furniture, food, and necessities; how the ladies only took one servant; and how the gentlemen intended to go without any, just to show their independence, and finally engaged two. In fact, Sir George would not go without his servant Sam. Sam was one of those faithful, worthy, attached servants, that he was miserable if his master went anywhere without him—his master reciprocating the sentiment tenfold. So after a hard battle with Captain Crabshawe, Sam was conceded, on the condition that he made himself useful to all the gentlemen, as well as his master.

This had been scarcely settled half a day, when all the Puffites were amazed at hearing that Captain Crabshawe had engaged another man to go with them, who rejoiced in the discordant name of Scruttles!

"Hah!" said the captain, ignoring their expressions of astonishment at this change in his tactics, "hah!—such a man!—the very fellow for us!—turned up quite by accident! He knows a thing or two—he's up to dodges—he's a cook, a valet, a gamekeeper, a fisherman—he can even be a lady's-maid, if wanted, which, thank the immortal powers, we don't—he has been in Australia!—in the bush!"

And he paused, that he might hear their expressions of delight; but as they had not got over their astonishment, none came. However, they were not ill-pleased to have this Phœnix.

"I am going to enjoy myself," observed the squire; "and

to do so, I must be comfortable ; and my notion of being comfortable is to have servants to do certain things for me. I have no objection to make my own bed, and blacken my own boots, once in a way ; but I feel I shall not like to do so often."

Before the final parting came, the form of the challenge was drawn up, signed, sealed, and delivered, each possessing a copy.

The substance of it was as follows ;—

Each party bound themselves to stay a month on their respective islands, only coming on shore for church.

(Captain Crabshawe had said—

"Why can't we read our prayers at home?"

"You can do so," answered Mrs. Joscelyn, "but we go to church."

"Just to show off your fine bonnets and silks and satins!"

"We should wish to avoid meeting you, certainly, and shall therefore attend no church at Rampton ; but will go to the little fishing village of Exe, which is scarcely a mile from Luff."

"Agreed."

"Our fine bonnets and silks and satins will be rather wasted there, Captain Crabshawe ; so perhaps you will give us credit for attending church from other motives than the one you so politely assigned us."

He was sorry to rouse Miss Severn's anger, but he never could understand what women would be at, and he did not mean to bother his head about them.)

Once a week the boat was to bring each island fresh provisions, clothes, books, and anything required, but a male or female, on the forbidden island.

Each party was to keep a journal, in which all were bound upon honour to write their impressions, at least once a week.

The challenge was lost by either party invading the sacred dominions of the other. At the same time, the ladies being of the order weak and helpless, in case of any extraordinary emergency, were to be permitted to hoist a flag, as a signal of distress:

This item was sternly repudiated by the captain, and as warmly insisted on by Frank Summers. Indeed, all the Puffs resolved that it should be allowed—the squire saying—

"It would make him happier."

Mr. Spooner, all his tenderest feelings roused by the approaching parting, declared he would not go "unless it was a settled thing," while Sir George remarked *sotto voce*—

"Just hoist the flag whenever you like, Miss Daintree, and I will come myself."

"You are very kind, but I fancy I would rather die than do such a thing!"

"Oh! nonsense, Miss Daintree; there are a number of things which would warrant your doing so. Robbers might invade your island."

"Clara takes Runa—Mrs. Spooner has Spitz."

"As if a Newfoundland dog and that snarling little brute could assist you! But you may be dull."

"Oh, no! I am going to take a kitten, little Bessie has a canary, and we are going to make ourselves very wise. I shall study astronomy, and Clara means to teach us molluscology, besides conchology, and geology——"

"For Heaven's sake, don't, Miss Daintree! If there is a thing in this world I dislike it is a blue woman; I mean a woman that is blue—clever, you know."

"And do you mean to infer I am not clever?"

"Of course, my dear Miss Daintree, I mean nothing of the sort. What I dislike are 'ologists' of any kind. I cannot bear to think of your 'ologising' in any way."

"But how can it affect you? I am a Luffite, you a Puffite. Are we on speaking terms?"

"Oh! Miss Daintree, I really think you take a pleasure in teasing me."

"Fortunately for you, this is my last opportunity. Good-bye, for a month—a whole month!"

"Remember the flag—promise me to hoist it."

"I will die first! With all my faults, I am true to my colours, and to my sex."

"She is provoking," murmured Sir George, "but prettier than ever; and it is the more provoking that I can't help liking all she says and does."

The challenge was lost if either party added to, or took from, the numbers with which they started, a margin being allowed in the matter of servants.

"For," said the captain, "we shall soon be rid of that useless fellow Sam—Scruttles will do all that we require."

The challenge was lost if either party received visitors for more than a day of their own sex. The challenge was lost if either party gave in. Thus all contingencies being considered, as said before, the documents were duly signed, sealed, and executed by the Puffs and Luffs. And now they are off—not quite at the same moment, for the ladies are waiting for Mrs. Spooner's hat, ordered for special island duty. It

had come home in time, trimmed with blue ribbons, but, conceiving green to be more appropriate, Mrs. Spooner had sent it back for this important alteration.

"Ha! ha!" was heard Captain Crabshawe's laugh, as they rowed away—"we don't forget anything." But in a few moments their boat returned—the squire had forgotten his fishing-rod.

This rod he had carried about under his arm at great inconvenience, not only to himself, but everybody who came near him, all the morning. He had awakened, he said, with the impression that he should leave it behind him, and he bore it about thus, to give his impression the lie.

Nevertheless his impression had been true to itself. He inadvertently laid it down by a mooring-post at the dock, confident that it would be safely remembered, so close at hand; but in taking leave of Mrs. Joscelyn and little Bessie, the natural feelings of husband and father had obliterated those of fishing and independence.

Captain Crabshawe was aghast at the alacrity with which his subjects (he being elected King of Puff, as Mrs. Joscelyn was chosen Queen of Luff) all took advantage of this return, and popped out like rabbits from his boat, to go and exchange a few last words with the ladies, sitting in their boat. However, he gathered them all together again—Frank Summers having the last parting word—

"Remember the flag."

It was a very elegant flag, and had been presented to the ladies that morning, with many pretty speeches. It was accepted by them in an equally gracious manner. Indeed, the moment of their separation seemed to open all their hearts to each other, obliterating all past offences on either side, and making even Captain Crabshawe civil—not to say complimentary.

The gentlemen had the satisfaction of seeing the messenger with the hat speeding for his life down the narrow precipitous path that led by a short cut from Deep-Cliffs to the beach. They gave a cheer, which came merrily over the water, as they saw the ladies' boat leave the shore. The two boats, to gain their respective islands, had to go at right angles. They watched each other until the intervening island of Nid hid boat from boat.

They had a chance of sighting each other again when Nid was past—that is, if other and more exciting matters did not occupy their thoughts.

.. Meantime we must not lag—we have a great deal to do

before night, as it is necessary to see both parties landed, and comfortably located for the night. As is fitting, the gentlemen shall have the post of honour, and their doings shall be chronicled first.

It is needless to say, they were all in good spirits. That love of adventure and frolic, which is supposed to dwell in all healthy and happy frames, was allowed free scope. They were all disposed to be extremely merry and good-natured ; and Captain Crabshawe was so beaming with benign and amiable thoughts, that his countenance glowed with the milk of human kindness ; while the squire, unable to contain the superabundance of his genial spirit, or to keep his activity in, stripped off his coat and took an oar—thus lending a willing hand to row himself to his fate.

The crew consisted of the five Puffites, two sailors, or boatmen, and the faithful Sam, who sat in the bow of the boat, jammed up with all sorts of luggage—a crate of kitchen utensils running into his back, and a barrel of beer rocking over his toes ; while he ardently clasped under each arm a stout bottle of blacking ; patent varnish, d'Orsay's polish, and Probert's cream paste, peeping out of his numerous pockets.

It might be that Sam disapproved of the whole plan, or that an obstreperous toasting-fork was lacerating some part of his person, or that the barrel of beer rolled over a tender corn, or that he was aware he was bristling over with bottles, and that the least movement on his part might provoke a smash. Some of these, or all of these, might be the cause why Sam's face was the only unhappy one on board.

It may be asked, where was the incomparable Scruttles—he of the rugged name—but superexcellent nature ? He had been sent to Puff two days before, not only to prepare for their reception, but to unpack and arrange their household matters.

It was delightful, the idea of being met and welcomed to their island home by so valued a dependant.

And there he was !

Whether their imaginations had been unusually stirred by the praises of Captain Crabshawe, and they had each secretly pictured to themselves their idea of what a model servant ought to be—the first sight of Scruttles dispelled them all at once, and for ever.

Indeed, his personal appearance was of so dubious a character, that the squire, unaccustomed and unable to contain his thoughts, abruptly exclaimed—

"Where did you pick up your ticket-of-leave?"

The question reddened the knob on Captain Crabshawe's face, but the complexion of Scruttles seemed incapable of further suffusion, and his feelings, if he had ever had any, were of that brick-batish order, they could not be hurt.

"He has been in trouble, certainly—but he is a capital fellow—he has been months camped out in the bush!"

"Ah! a returned convict!"

"My dear Squire, how inconsiderate you are—you might hurt his feelings!"

"Yours I may, perhaps, so I beg your pardon; but his—well, you are answerable for him—and we will remember, as no man made himself, so is no man responsible for being more than ordinarily ill-looking. 'Handsome is as handsome does.' A very good motto. But now, hold hard! I don't stir a step until I have had something to drink. Rowing is thirsty work. Sam, hand out the hamper of porter—now the soda-water. We will have a go of shandy-gaff all round."

It was some time before these hampers could be extracted. When they were pulled out from beneath everything else there was no corkscrew. The squire, feeling the more thirsty the more obstacles were thrown in his way, which is one of the signs of the active operation of the nerve opiniatum, settled that question by knocking off the heads of the bottles, which he did just in time to discover there was no jug. This crisis was met by the activity of Scruttles, who pulled out a bran new kettle by its spout from the crate, and presented it just in time. Finally, there were no tumblers, or anything handy out of which to drink. But with the indomitable perseverance of the ancient Briton, the squire put his mouth to the spout, and sucked in a gigantic quaff, with exceeding relish and satisfaction.

They then marched up, laden with packages, to take possession of their palace. They were very well acquainted with its appearance and capabilities, having often visited the island with shooting-parties and pic-nics.

The house had been originally begun by a sort of adventurer, who, before a lighthouse had been placed on Ribble, gained a livelihood by collecting the *débris* of the numerous wrecks that occurred in the bay, and which drifted round to Puff, by some peculiarity of the current.

When his vocation was gone, by the establishment of light-houses and buoys, and other safeguards, Government enlarged the house, and formed it into a sort of shelter for the crews

of pilot-boats or fishing-smacks, whose power of returning home was often seriously endangered by shore winds, and an inwash of the tide, that as often swept them out to sea again as not.

But the owner of the islands, having reason to suspect that many took shelter there for no other reason than to shoot rabbits, made Government build another refuge on Ribble, where the lighthouse was placed.

He then altered, enlarged, and freshened up the house to its present condition, and let it out, with the rabbit-warren (which had become extremely valuable) to parties of gentlemen, and sometimes to London dealers—the first for the sake of sporting, the second for the value of the rabbits.

The house consisted of one large hall, with a staircase running up one side, which led to a sleeping chamber. A gallery or staircase outside led to two more on the other side, and joined on to a series of excavations, made out of the limestone rock. The first of these was a sort of corridor or passage, with large loopholes letting in light and air, but on occasions wind, spray, and rain. This opened into a good-sized room, with handsome windows framed into the rock. It was furnished with a brazier, or basket fireplace, the smoke of which went up through a funnel-shaped opening, down which, in years long gone by, the smugglers let their goods, and hid them in the caverns that now formed chambers. On the other side of this room was the kitchen, the smoke of whose fire went up through the same opening. Beyond the kitchen was still another chamber, and so extraordinarily soft and pliable was the cliff, that it might have been excavated in all directions with very little trouble, and a hundred people live in it, like rabbits in burrows.

Notwithstanding the disappointment regarding the looks of Scruttles, the squire had been favourably impressed with his quickness in providing him with the substitute for a jug at an opportune moment: All the way up to the house he argued to himself,

“Villainous-looking as the fellow is, he has his wits about him—no doubt we shall find everything most comfortably arranged.”

But the scene that presented itself, when they entered the hall, at first startled them, and then fortunately amused them. They all sat down on any seat they could find, and roared with laughter.

Their beds were thrown promiscuously anywhere; a sort of bush encampment was improvised round the fireplace;

the chairs and tables were all piled away in a corner as lumber, and it appeared to be the prevailing impression of Mr. Scruttles that they were to bivouac, one and all, in this place and none other. Their guns were all put ready for action, while their portmanteaux, desks, boxes, books, and little luxuries, were stowed out of the way in a sort of cellar.

It required a vast deal of seeking and finding before each had collected his own property. But, lighting the pipes of independence, they each set heartily to work, and if they were astonished at the bush arrangements of the "returned convict," nothing could exceed his amazement at the result of their labours.

He and Sam were hustled off to the kitchen and the small room adjoining, whither they were bid to take their private property and the kitchen utensils, arranging them as they liked best. The hall was soon cleared of beds and bedding, the squire and Mr. Spooner agreeing to occupy the large bed-room, Sir George and Mr. Summers the next largest, and Captain Crabshawe was to have a little den to himself. Chairs and tables were placed in the excavated room next to the kitchen, and there they agreed to take all their meals, which would leave the hall always sacred to themselves.

They were, to use the squire's expression, "as jolly as sand-boys," though one or two little miffs or scuds of temper flew about, by way of variety.

Thus Sir George was nettled at the captain's remarks upon the quantity of his luggage.

"Are those three portmanteaux yours, Follett?" asked he.

"Yes, my dear Crab. I have a weakness for shirts. I wear two—sometimes three a day."

"The deuce you do! How are they to be washed here, I should like to know? Look at me—I am hampered with nothing but what I stand in, and the contents of this mere bag."

It was a mere bag.

Strange to say, no one complimented the captain upon the smallness of his luggage.

"That Sam of yours seems utterly helpless—he thinks of nothing but his pots of blacking, which are entirely useless here."

"I should say my servant was quite as good as yours. He has been staring at us the last half-hour, when, you would naturally conclude, he ought to be cooking our dinner."

"By-the-bye, that's well thought on. Crab, what are we to have for dinner?"

"Anything you like, Squire."

"Let me advise a cold dinner to-day," said Mr. Spooner. "It is now almost three o'clock, and you know we have a round of beef, Perigord pies, and a ham already cooked."

"Ah ! that was Elizabeth's idea—bringing ——"

"Squire, no woman's name allowed here."

"Well, at all events let me suggest soup for dinner, and hot potatoes. The rest of it we can very well make out with the cold meat. We have portable soup, haven't we, Spoon ?"

"Yes, we have ; but allow me to remark, I object to my name being shortened."

"No offence, old fellow. I thought here we were to do just as we liked, without the chance of affront."

"You see, my name is such an awkward one, Squire."

"I don't see that at all ; you wouldn't mind my saying Fork, I suppose, presuming your name was Forker ?"

"No, not at all."

"In fact," whispered Sir George confidentially to Frank, "Spoon is a little too appropriate to be pleasant."

"Humph !" answered Frank, which was no doubt an intelligible reply to Sir George. "Now, whose books are these ?" he asked aloud.

"They are mine," answered the captain, not without a regular feminine smirk of satisfaction.

"You have rather an odd assortment. 'Paley's Evidences,' 'Bailey's Turf Guide,' 'The Protoplast,' 'The Complete Grazer,' 'Ephemera.'"

As he read the names aloud most of his auditors burst out laughing. Men are many of them incapable of controlling their risible faculties ; but indulge in them, no matter the result. Now, it must be conceded that the other sex have infinite tact on such occasions. Their kindness of heart is such, that they will hear the most absurd mistake, witness the most ridiculous sight, and do both without moving a muscle of their countenance. Whereas our Puffites laughed—and laughed all the louder when they perceived their captain, their king, looking much nettled.

In fact, it was pretty well known amongst his friends that Captain Crabshawe was by no means a literary fellow ; but having that sort of disposition that made him desirous of the character of excellency in everything, he had selected his library more to sustain a learned reputation than for absolute use.

In the ordinary intercourse of life, his friends were conscious that he often made dashes at hard words, and as often

failed to achieve the feat of pronouncing them correctly. And in the matter of spelling, he had been heard to say, to do so by rule, and according to Johnson, was a mere matter of taste.

Seeing him about to burst forth in angry invectives—for the captain had so much of a feminine nature in him as to be ready to retort on the least provocation—the amiable Frank said—

“Come, Squire, I have done all I can, shall we go to the highest part of the island and take an observation?”

“Hah! only to see after that flag I saw you give the ladies,” quoth the captain, determined to have his wrath out somehow. “I hardly think it is hoisted yet. I am not too much impressed with the amount of wisdom ladies can stow away in their empty heads, but I will do them this justice—that flag is still in its case.”

“So I should hope,” answered Summers, politely; “at the same time, I mean to find out on Puff the most eligible point for seeing Luff before I sleep to-night.”

“That is very good-natured of you, Frank, considering all things,” remarked Sir George.

“I don’t know anything about the good-nature; when a man pleases himself, he is usually styled selfish, and not good-natured.”

“Whether selfish or good-natured, I give you all due notice I do not intend to pay the least attention to that flag. We came here to be entirely free from the whims, weaknesses, and wickednesses ——”

“Come, come, Crab, no vilifying of the absent. There are enough of us, without outraging your feelings, to go to the ladies’ assistance when they signal for us. Meantime, Squire, I will accompany you and Frank over the island. I have ordered the dinner.”

Some mumbling words from Captain Crabshawe about everybody ordering everything without reference to him, were unnoticed by the gentlemen, who, relighting their pipes of independence, started off on their expedition. They were soon followed by the captain, who arrived in time to hear Sir George say,

“Sam is positively afraid to be alone with him—he is a murderer!—an escaped convict! ——”

“He is no such thing, Follett,” interrupted the captain; “he has been in trouble, as I said before—a simple case of poaching ——”

“And killing a gamekeeper?” suggested the squire.

"Not at all; I never heard of his killing anyone. He was transported, certainly, and he has now come home on leave ——"

"Just as I said," again interrupted the squire; "a ticket-of-leave!"

"Upon my word, Squire, there isn't a hope of getting a single sentence finished when you are by."

"I beg your pardon, Crab—go on, I will listen like a block."

"Well, Scruttles, but **for** this one misfortune, bears an excellent character. I believe his story is quite a romance. He is an excellent fellow—really a first-rate fellow!"

The captain was suffered to go on reiterating these praises without an interruption; but finding he had really nothing more to say, Frank Summers announced "that here, and here only, should he plant a staff of observation."

The gentlemen proceeded to use their **eyes**, instead of their **tongues**, and took a good survey of the scene around and about them. They were on the highest part of the island. By turning round they could view the whole of their little kingdom, surrounded by its white fringe of waves bordering the deep blue mantle of the sea.

There was no lack of life, **for** flights of sea-birds were off on their afternoon repast, wheeling round **and** round, and each uttering its discordant cries, as if to announce to each other the intrusion of strangers. Some bolder than the rest, made off in single flights, and flew high over the light feathery smoke that now began to issue from the palace of the Puffs. As if to confirm their suspicions, these flew back in swift and steady flight to their different flocks, when the whole alighted on some prominent rock, and appeared to hold a solemn assembly.

What they discussed, **the plans** they organised, the speeches they made, of course can only be known to those conversant with bird language and habits. But it is not unlikely their parliament ended much as human parliaments; for, after a vast deal of commotion and noise, hunger seemed to gain the day. Slowly, and by degrees, they all soon dispersed to their feeding-ground, and **the presence** of intruding strangers seemed utterly forgotten.

But they were not the **only living things**. From out of tufts of grass, from behind stones, from underneath a plume of ferns, out of little sandy holes, came innumerable rabbits, among which ran the pretty peewits, like little ladies, with their skirts tucked up. Bright-eyed dotterels sat on tufts of

the coarse grass ; and the whole island was moving with life and beauty.

It was impossible to resist the impression of the scene, or the serenity and happiness that filled their minds as they looked around, and saw themselves shut off, as it were, from all the conventionalities of every-day life. A perception of their freedom from all the ties of society, of the healthful, careless life they might now lead, and the relaxation from usual habits, and common cares, were enjoyable enough, without the loveliness of everything around them.

The squire could see his beautiful home, embowered in shrubs and woods, and yet not regret his absence from its luxuries.

Sir George, for the first time, was impressed with a wonder of, and admiration for, nature — the perception causing a glow of feeling in his heart, as fresh and pure as the sea-breeze cooling his cheek.

Both Mr. Spooner and Frank had turned towards the other islands, and watched with intense and delighted interest a little puff of smoke suddenly rising out of the wood-sheltered house on Luff ; this soon began to rise in columns of rolling, unfolding, circling vapour, which, inflating and swelling, were caught by flying zephyrs. These bore them away in little fleecy clouds, as if to curtain heaven anew, but, alas ! of earthly birth, they knew their unworthiness, and died of shame by the way.

“ They are there ! ” whispered the one to the other.

Mr. Spooner’s face bore the expression his friends remembered to have seen in his bridal days—his heart was soft towards his Arabella. And in whatever manner the owner of the brown hat, bordered by the blue veil, had comported herself towards Mr. Summers, that gentleman bore no malice in his heart against her, now that three miles of water were between him and her—temper.

Captain Crabshawe was alone unmoved by the soft beauty of the evening shadows, by the calm loveliness of everything around him. He was taking imaginary shots in his mind at the birds and rabbits, and congratulating himself secretly that he was about saving board and lodging for a month. For though all had contributed towards the expenses of their expedition, his share had dwindled down, through the lavishness of the others, into nothing. He was to be comfortably lodged, royally fed, and highly amused—an all for nothing. A mode of payment which exactly suited his ideas.

Thus they all sat, "conversing with their own thoughts," for nearly an hour.

At last the squire, who had made the nearest approach to a romantic state of mind that ever occurred to him in his life, heaved a sort of sigh of happiness.

"Ah ! yes," he mused aloud, "that is Luff ; Elizabeth is there, and no doubt making herself extremely comfortable."

"Had not you better all invoke your loves?" said the captain, ironically. "The squire has set you a good example."

Mr. Joscelyn winced, but carried off his discomfiture by exclaiming,

"Come, I have sat until I am chilled. I mean to go round our dominions at a brisk pace, and then home to dinner."

When they returned from their walk, the squire went up to his room gaily carolling, his appetite in that happy state he could devour a horse.

Captain Crabshawe turned into the kitchen to see after his "excellent convict." Sir George called aloud for Sam, while Mr. Spooner and Mr. Summers inspected the arrangements for dinner.

Evidently the "excellent convict" had laid the cloth according to the rules of bush life. In the centre of the table were the knives and forks, laid straight, but all together. Some rough salt in a tea-cup, a few spoons and two beer horns, completed the picture. But that was not all.

"Spooner, look here ! I declare it is—it must be a sheet—it is my sheet—here is my name, marked by my mother ! Have we no table-cloths, that one of my sheets is used for us to dine on ?"

A hue-and-cry for Scruttles. Scruttles was at that ticklish part of his cooking when the portable soup was on the boil. Even when he did come, the "excellent convict" by no means entered into the feelings of the gentlemen regarding Mr. Summers' sheet.

"Sam wor a-busy a-settling Sir Folly's baggidge, and bid I lay a cloth. And I took the first to hand ; and as for a sheet, maybees it's a sheet, but wot odds, so it wor summat of a cloth, if gentlefolks wud have a cloth—but for my part, I'd as lief not be fashed wi' un."

"Fashed or no, go and bring a table-cloth."

"Pooh, pooh, Frank !" interrupted the captain, now

joining them. "There is no time to lay the dinner-table again."

"If you called that table laid, there is—for my part, time must be found—if I do it myself."

Feeling greatly for Summers' awkward position, Spooner offered to help, and together they laid the table in first-rate style, calling Scruttles, now in a second crisis of the soup boiling up, to come and take a lesson as to how a table should be laid for gentlemen to dine on.

"Gude sakes! to think o' taiking a' thon pains to put a bit victual in one's mooth!" was all the "excellent convict" remarked.

Meantime the squire made his appearance, looking as fresh and *débonnaire* as if he was about to dine with Her Majesty. His passion for ablutions entitled him to be ranked among the amphibia race.

"Hullo, Squire, what a swell you are!" exclaimed the captain, as the two improvised butlers rushed off to perform their toilettes. "Now, I considered that one of the chief pleasures of coming to the island was a freedom from the bore of dressing, which one is obliged to submit to, owing to female arbitrariness."

"Humph!" answered the squire, "I have a certain respect for a fellow called Jack Joscelyn, and I always pay him the compliment of a clean shirt, hands, and face, even when he and I dine alone."

"Gracious heavens!" shouted Mr. Spooner, out of the little window of the bed-room he shared with the squire, "this room, our room, is swimming in water—everything splashed in every direction!"

"I thought it was a confounded small place to wash in—I must take to the sea, I suppose. Ha! here is the soup—steaming hot, too!—make haste, my boys!"

"Ay, he be hot, he have biled up twice, yer honour."

"Twice!" echoed the squire, looking dubious.

He lifted up the lid to see what might be the probable effects of two boilings—if anything strange. There was! On the top of the soup floated various matters, giving it the same appearance as the surface of a pond on a thrashing day.

"Crab, come here!" shouted the squire; "can this be the effect of double boiling?"

"I suppose so—it smells good."

The face of Scruttles underwent different phases of ugliness as he anxiously regarded them. He tried to look

pleased, but he only seemed a greater convict than ever, as the squire put on the lid again, and sat down.

The squire said "grace," we presume under the idea it would hasten his companions; the squire altered the position of the decanters on the table; he played with his knife and fork; he cut a bit out of his bread and ate it.

The squire again raised the lid of the soup tureen. What had been floating about in various particles before was now settled down, into a sort of repulsive crust.

"Shall I giv her another bile," suggested Scruttles, who now looked so hideous, a prey to the deepest, most perspiring anxiety, that the squire stared at him in amazement at the sight. But, as before stated, being of a just nature, he could not but appreciate the "excellent convict's" ardent solicitude to please.

"Poor beast," soliloquised the squire, "he does his best. Was he born so? or was it accident? What can he have done with the rest of his nose? and how comes one eye to be so much higher in his face than the other. How hot he is, poor wretch! Well, when I see a man anxious to please, striving to do his best, I endeavour to think nothing of his personal appearance, but—hullo! here they are! Come along, my fine fellows! Sit down—do. I have said 'grace.' Who's for soup?—it smells good."

The first spoonful explained its strange appearance, and sent all but Captain Crabshawe spluttering out of the room. The "excellent convict" had not considered it necessary to wash out the new saucepan before he used it, consequently the prevailing taste of the twice boiled portable soup was that of sawdust and straw. But the potatoes were excellent, the round of beef super-excellent; the squire, as he expressed it, dined royally; he flirted from beef to pie, from pie to ham, and completed his dinner with a junk of double Gloucester cheese that would have sufficed for a labourer's dinner.

'Tis true, they had all to wait a good deal upon themselves. Sam appeared to see perfectly well what his master required, but no one else; and all that Scruttles was able to do in the waiting line, was to stand and stare in amazement at the way in which "quality" dined.

With hearts brimful of satisfied happiness, no sooner was the cloth removed, than simultaneously they lit their pipes of freedom and delight, and vigorously puffed away for an hour, in token of their emancipation from curtains and woman's whims.

At the end of that time, the squire's digestion, disordered as he said by the spoonful of soup that had inadvertently got down his throat, before he was aware of its peculiar composition — or, as we say, by unlimited smoking — loudly demanded a corrective.

"Can your crack convict make us a cup of coffee, Crabshawe?"

"Of course. Here, Scruttles, send in coffee."

When Sam brought it in, all eyes were turned thereon; it looked good, dark, clear, bright—it also smelt good, and thoroughly like coffee.

Fearlessly the squire took a good gulp, then he made one rush, followed by Sir George and Spooner, equally affected.

They were all heard spluttering, coughing, and choking outside.

Captain Crabshawe, nettled to such a degree that the knob on his face resembled a live coal, calmly sipped away, as if his coffee were delicious.

Mr. Summers cogitated over his, tasting it deliberately. Then he arose, and went out to reassure his friends.

"Don't be alarmed—you are not poisoned. You have only got the remains of the squire's shandygaff mixed with your coffee. It had been left, I presume, in the tea-kettle."

The squire's digestion was nevertheless still so disordered, as to prevent him from thoroughly appreciating the satisfaction of not being poisoned; and as the only solace left him, he took up his candle and went to bed. The others sat down to more pipes and whist.

But not long did they play or smoke in peace. From out of the bed-chamber of the squire, preceded by a few preliminary snorts, there issued a clang and a clamour of sound that startled them all. A deep sepulchral groan was followed by a strangled shriek; a suffocated roar gave place to an explosive howl. To suppose that the sounds were human, that they proceeded from one mouth, was impossible.

The amiable Frank sprang up, and rushed six steps at a time to the rescue; Mr. Spooner followed, armed with the poker; Sir George seized a gun from the wall; Captain Crabshawe grasped his cards like grim death (he had three honours among them), and looked round indignant—yet afraid.

The two reached the squire's room in a trice, expecting to

find him struggling with some sea-monster in a deadly contest. But he was alone, and, as they rushed in, he opened one merry blue eye and said,

"Hullo, Spoon! coming to bed, eh?"

"My dear Squire—Mr. Joscelyn, we heard the most fearful sounds—the most awful noise from this room? Are you ill?"

"Ill! no. Noise! nothing of the kind. I haven't been to sleep yet. Good-night—Frank—Spoo!"

His eyes closed, his mouth opened, his great chest heaved with such a mighty breath of wind, no wonder there was a struggle to get it out. Then it came with a rush, a roar, a moan, a groan!

"Mr. Joscelyn, arouse yourself! You must be ill—in a fit!"

"Hullo! can't you let a man sleep quietly. I believe I snore a little—at least, Elizabeth says ——"

And again his eyes closed; again he struggled, roared, groaned. They watched him for some time, and perceiving that there really was nothing the matter with him, that he was, in fact, in an unconscious state of bliss, they left him and returned to their game.

The captain still grasped his three honours. Sir George still shouldered his gun. But reassured, they began to play.

"Can nothing be done to stop that noise?" exclaimed the captain, as he trumped his partner's trick with one of his honours, though he had the two of trumps handy—had any trump been needed.

"We shall not be able to sleep all night," said the captain.

"I share his room!" murmured Mr. Spooner; "it is like a discharge of cracked artillery!"

"I find it in my heart, for the first time, to pity a woman. When can Mrs. Joscelyn have got her rest?"

"She does not seem to suffer, Crab, judging by her looks."

"She doesn't, Summers—there you are right. I don't mind acknowledging that, for a woman, Mrs. Joscelyn is not wholly detestable."

"You have not thought very ill of Miss Daintree, lately, Crabshawe, judging by the manner in which you have been flirting with her the last few days."

"Ha! ha!" (*aloud*) "he's jealous!" (*to himself*). "Well, she isn't a bad sort of girl, as girls go. I am not a marrying

man, as all the world knows—and I sincerely hope she does also. But 'tis different with you, Follett. Your situation is such that you are bound to marry—poor unfortunate fellow ! And so this I will say, as you must marry, why, choose little Kate, and you won't go far wrong."

(Why did not Mr. Summers rise and protest, as he had done in the case of Miss Severn, against the impropriety of familiarly naming a lady without her proper title? Sir George perhaps did not give him time, for he answered hotly)—

"Thank you for nothing ! I may marry, and I mayn't ; but at all events, I shall marry whom I please, without consulting Captain Crabshawe !"

"I daresay you will ; but let me tell you, you are a young fellow that wants advice ; and knowing that, I give it to you, and it is, marry Miss Daintree, and you will have as good a wife as circumstances will permit."

"That is poor praise, Crabshawe," interrupted Mr. Spooner.

"Miss Daintree is scarcely so pretty as charming !" said Frank.

"Come, come, I don't want to quarrel with you all !"

"You will do so, Sir, if you thrust your advice on people who don't want it—who despise it !"

"We win the rubber," interrupted Frank, hoping to stem the tide now surging between these two Puffites ; "a treble, a single, and the rub."

"People always desire what they mostly require," retorted the captain.

"Come, come," interposed Mr. Spooner, "don't say any more that it requires feminine tongues to provoke a wrangle. Shake hands, and let us go to bed."

His mediation was as useless as Frank's. So, taking advantage of a calm in the squire's lullaby, he went off to bed.

Summers took a few turns up and down the open corridor, from whence he could see the Island of Luff, peacefully slumbering in the translucent embrace of a moonbeam.

How the captain and Sir George ended their dispute is not known, and appears not to have been of sufficient importance to record.

It seemed, however, to have awakened in the frame of Sir George the nerve opiniatum ; for he never lost an opportunity of reflecting upon the merits of Miss Daintree, whenever her name was mentioned ; though secretly all the while, as you and I know, dear reader, he was mightily enamoured of her,

Captain Crabshawe is by no means the first person who has spoiled a match by talking of it beforehand.

Human nature is very weak, of which we have already recorded one or two instances. But in the matter of giving and receiving advice, it is more puerile and pig-headed than under any other circumstances.

One more day at Puff, when we will leave their manly, jovial company, and proceed to visit the meeker, milder society of the ladies. The squire, intent only upon getting to bed, and unable to suppose there was anything against so simple a measure, had not observed that there were no sheets on his couch. He snoozed away comfortably all the night between the blankets. Captain Crabshawe was personally indifferent as to sheets, so did without. Sam made his master's bed with infinite labour, assisted by Mr. Spooner and Mr. Summers, and assisting them in return.

So the Puffites reposed peacefully, the first night of their liberty in their kingdom of Puff.

By daybreak the squire awoke, like a giant refreshed, and, with towel in hand, gaily carolled down to the beach. Once in the sea, he took advantage of unlimited space and inexhaustible water, to disport himself after the manner of a lively and white-skinned hippopotamus.

This employment sent him up to the "Palace of Freedom," "hungry as a workhouse-boy," to use his own expression. His great heart failed him, as, arriving, he looked around and saw not only an entire absence of anything like preparations for breakfast, but everything in exactly the same state of disorder as when he went to bed. Dirty plates, the abominable coffee, unwashed wine glasses, ashes of tobacco, cups and saucers, all strewn about—and not a soul stirring!

The squire, incapable of doing any deed quietly, generally apportioning his strength by the barometer of his feelings, split the door open into the kitchen, and extracted from their sleeping quarters Scruttles—who looked more hideous than ever asleep—with one hand, and Sam with the other.

Setting them a noble example of activity, he was not long ere he had effected a wonderful change for the better in all the arrangements.

Even Sam preferred exerting himself to being kicked; and Scruttles, as we have seen, was only too anxious to please.

Breakfast was laid in an efficient and masterly manner; the kettle was boiling in first-rate style; slices of ham were all cut ready to broil; and at the end of an hour, hot, thirsty,

but highly pleased with himself, the squire sat down to survey his work.

Of course he had made a prodigious noise about it, and his companions, finding it impossible to sleep, made a virtue of necessity, and turned out.

Just as the squire sat down and was wiping his brows, Spooner appeared, towel in hand.

"Ah! Spooner, I'll accompany you, and have another dip in the sea. I shall eat my thumbs if I stay here any longer waiting breakfast."

As they returned from their bath they were gratified by seeing Frank pouring out the tea. An amiable odour of fried ham permeated the balmy air; and, for want of something better, a lot of steaming eggs jostled each other in snowy contour in the slop-basin. It was a luxurious, a delicious breakfast.

The squire called for dish after dish of broiled ham, and "brochured" the teapot twice—feats that excited the admiration of his companions, to say nothing of their satisfaction. For the squire in good humour, and the squire in the dumps, made as much difference in their comfort as we are taught their exists in two other worlds—those placed above and below this terrestrial globe.

Leaving them thus happy, we will unfold the wings of imagination, and fly to the Island of Luff.





CHAPTER IV.

“LUFF” IT IS.

IF the ladies were not so rampant in spirits as the gentlemen on their departure from civilised life, they were by no means in a melancholy mood.

That love of change, even adventure, which is the general characteristic of natives of the British Isles, was fully developed in them ; and without any misgivings as to their happiness, they returned the cheers of the gentlemen, with waving of handkerchiefs and cheerful farewells.

Their boat was, strange to say, less encumbered with luggage than that of the gentlemen ; but they had two dogs, a kitten, and a canary.

In the bow of the boat sat one of those sturdy, shiny-faced, active-looking servants that are seldom to be seen now-a-days. A bonnet of portentous size, elaborately decorated with extraordinary bows of ribbon, adorned her head. A large plaid shawl, of every hue under the sun, was violently pinned across her chest. She had a bandbox in each hand, and one at her feet, tied over with a coloured cotton handkerchief.

If there was any lurching of the boat, any up-and-down movement, she grasped her two boxes tighter, and looked at the one at her feet, as if she must take it in her teeth. Evidently Susan had made up her mind to follow her mistress to the world's end, to share her dangers, and accept the same fate. But she must have her three band-boxes with her, even if that fate as drowning.

They had long pull to their island, and, as is the fashion of ladies, they imagined their boatmen must be dying of fatigue, and so called on them to rest every now and then.

A slight ground swell rendered these stoppages moments of apprehensive misery to one or two. Mrs. Spooner turned

white, then green, and then cried, and begged them, in her confusion, to put her down somewhere.

Susan also turned blue and yellow, though still sitting bolt upright, still grasping her two boxes, and keeping an eye on the third. Finally, Susan was, to use her own phrase, "puked," beyond a reprieve, and had to succumb; and losing her boxes, groaned over the side of the boat, declaring, between whiles, "that she had as lief be dead at once!"

However, all things, disagreeable and otherwise, have an end. The grating of the keel of the boat against the shingly beach of their little kingdom gave them all a thrill of delight. They jumped on shore with alacrity; the boatmen helped to carry up their things to the house, and receiving each a bottle of beer and some food, they departed, with hearty wishes for the ladies' happiness and welfare.

The house on Luff was merely a shell of a building, fitted up by subscription among the Rampton people, for the use of pic-nic parties.

When the gentlemen remarked that it was a better house than that on Puff, it certainly was handsomer, more airy, and more gaily decorated. But for useful purposes it was very deficient.

There was one large room, generally called "the ball-room;" and very large and desolate it looked to our poor Luffites, as they arrived and took possession. Out of the ball-room, by small shabby folding-doors, they entered a tea-room, which was now fitted up as a bed-room for Mrs. Joscelyn and her little daughter Bessie. At the back of these two rooms was a good-sized kitchen, with a small one adjoining. Over these were two bed-rooms, the approach to which was by a staircase near the kitchen-door. There were no rooms over the saloon and tea-room, they being as lofty as the back of the house.

Mrs. Joscelyn had herself superintended the cleaning and freshening of the house, and had arranged the bed-rooms. She was the only one who had been to the island since the challenge, but her companions had often visited it on other occasions. Either a sudden conviction of their lonely condition, or a misgiving as to the comfort of living in this odd house, began to dawn upon their minds; but certainly the expression on each face was a little doleful.

Mrs. Joscelyn alone wore a cheerful aspect.

"Light every fire at once, Susan," said she; "you see they are all laid ready; and then put the sheets and blankets to air before them. This room I took for Bessie and me, be-

cause I thought it best I should be on the ground-floor. Susan also has the inner kitchen for her room, and—come up-stairs. Here you see I have had your own beds put, my dears—one on each side of the window. This corner of the room I had screened off with a curtain for your bath-room; and on this landing, here is another curtain, underneath which you can hang your dresses. This room, Arabella, being the smallest, I have appropriated to your sole use. You sent your own furniture over, and I have arranged it to the best of my ability; but if you take my advice, you will let us have the cheval glass in the saloon—it will help to fill up the vacant spaces of that desolate apartment; and your room will be much more comfortable without it."

"I had no idea I was to have this little poky room," answered Mrs. Spooner.

"Would you like to share mine, and I will send Bessie up here?"

"No, thank you—not for to-night. I see all my things are unpacked, and nicely arranged. I feel still very poorly, and have not strength to change."

"I daresay we shall all amuse ourselves by changing our arrangements from time to time. You can try how you like this room for a few nights. But the cheval glass ——"

"Oh! yes—take it; but who is take it down-stairs? I must say, Mrs. Joscelyn, I cannot conceive why you did not permit us to bring a proper quantity of servants."

"My reasons were many. In the first place, servants here would be rather in our way; secondly, they would not have borne the life we must lead, and we should have lost the challenge from their fault, and not our own; thirdly, Susan is a peculiar servant—she has a temper. The only way to keep it in order is to give her so much to do she has not time to think of grievances. Had she a fellow-servant there would be nothing but incessant bickering. As it is, she is rather proud that I have selected her to accompany us. I have so far confided in her as to tell her of the challenge; and I don't think there is one amongst us more anxious to gain the victory. Are my reasons sufficient for you?"

"They are unanswerable, I think," said Clara.

"Clara," thought Mrs. Spooner, "has no right to answer for us all. I was going to say something the same, but now I won't. She is too forward!"

So the nerve opiniatum in Mrs. Spooner's head, where it always lived, and never went further, made her say—

"Not at all. Why are servants to be considered more than ourselves?"

"Fortunately I have still another reason, and that has reference to ourselves only. I argued to myself that if we were going to live here for a month, to make the time pass tolerably we must lead lives wholly different from what we did at home. We must have all the excitement that variety gives to make the time go."

"Oh! my dear aunt—make the time go! You don't mean to insinuate we shall be dull!"

"I won't answer for you, Kitten, but I think I shall be dull myself, unless I help Susan to make pies and puddings, dust my own sitting-room, make my own bed, and lead the life of an everlasting sort of pic-nic. I brought no more servants that we might have the enjoyment of being our own."

"A very good idea, Mrs. Joscelyn; during this month I shall make myself an adept in house-cleaning and cooking. As I have heard it said, the more a mistress knows of a servant's duties, the better she is served."

"Why, gossip! is this you talking of being mistress of an establishment! Ah! you may blush! Well, I am supposed to be an innocent little atom of humanity; but still I am very glad I flirted with Captain Crabshawe last Wednesday evening, a little before or after ten o'clock, even if he brings me into court for a breach of promise of marriage."

"You conceited little kitten!"

"I don't despair of it. I assure you I rather like flirting. I have a little experience in it, and my experience tells me I could soon wheedle Captain Crabshawe out of his heart."

"If he has one, Kate."

"That is true, Mrs. Spooner, if, as you say, he has one. I am inclined to think he has, only it has been long locked up in some dusty old corner of his frame, and he has forgotten where he put it. Should he chance to find it, what a scrubbing, and brushing, and brightening the poor thing will have to undergo, so long unused!"

"Arabella," interrupted Mrs. Joscelyn, "here is a cup of hot tea, which will do you good after your voyage. Then I should advise you to lie down for a while, and when you feel quite yourself come down-stairs and be surprised."

Which she was.

No one could have said that the Luffites had any care or dejection or fear in their hearts had they seen them, when Mrs. Spooner joined them again.

The great empty ball-room was wholly metamorphosed.

Large folding screens divided it into two parts, one taking in three windows and the other two. In the small half everything was arranged as for a dining-room. In the larger, Mrs. Spooner acknowledged she had never seen a prettier drawing-room. From whence Mrs. Joscelyn had procured her pretty muslin curtains, her few pictures, amongst them the spirited likenesses of her two boys, her comfortable chairs, sofas, writing-tables, screens, ornamental china, and a hundred other things that added beauty and elegance, as well as a home look to their aforetime dreary abode, no one could tell, for no one had seen their departure or arrival.

She enjoyed their delight.

"Where there is a will there is a way," said she; "though we were banished from male society, there was no necessity to forget that we were ladies, and so required elegant and pretty things about us. You see our cheval glass, Arabella, is very ornamental—especially now that Clara has hid the frame with muslin festoons. Can you suggest anything to improve our drawing-room?"

Mrs. Spooner thought she could, but at present what the exact improvement was she was not prepared to say—it would come to her mind by degrees.

"Very well," said Mrs. Joscelyn, "that is what I like—change of all sorts. Now, suppose, as it is past three o'clock, and we don't dine until five, that we go and survey our dominions. After to-day, you know, we have agreed to keep early hours—dine at one, tea at seven."

"Susan says," interrupted little Bessie, all eagerness, "that we must go to the well for water. It is such a ridiculous well, that when the tide is high the water is salt—when it ebbs, then the water is fit for use. So this *is* just the time."

The palace of the kingdom of Luff was placed in a small sheltered grove of trees. These trees were but stunted affairs by way of trees. Nevertheless, all bolstered up together, they endeavoured to look imposing; and but for an inevitable leaning all one way, which gave them the appearance of a flock of school-boys, half frightened, and half brave, leaning one against the other for boldness and support, they would have done very well.

As it was, they sheltered the abode of the Luffites from a blustering and always intruding west wind; and they led, through their slanting stems, down to a little glade, out of which sparkled, not one well, as Bessie said, but nine. 'Tis true, all these wells sprung but from one source, but there

were nine distinct mouths to that source, each of which had been provided with a rude but picturesque stone cistern.

Nothing could be wilder or prettier than the scene. The water was bubbling up with an underground murmur that suggested the music of the fairies; while the three girls, running to and fro, filling their pitchers at different cisterns, and making the dell echo with their merry laughter, caused even Mrs. Spooner to utter aloud her delight.

She and Mrs. Joscelyn were not permitted by the younger ones to draw the water. They were to sit still and look on, until Susan cried "Enough!" This being said, they all proceeded to walk round their dominions.

Luff was not more than two miles long, and five round. It was not composed of high cliffs, and hills, and dales, like Puff, but was rather flat. In fact, the house was on the highest part of it. There were several pretty little sheltered coves, delicious little dwellings for mermaids, and in one of them they decided to enact the part of sirens, and learn to swim.

Altogether they found so much to like and admire in their new kingdom, that it wanted only ten minutes to dinner when they reached their palace again.

"Luckily we need not dress for dinner here," said Mrs. Spooner, throwing herself down on an easy chair, and divesting herself of the hat with green ribbons, her gloves and shawl.

"Do as you please," replied their queen—"I mean to dress. No doubt you will find Susan has taken hot water to your room."

This hint was of the broadest order. Mrs. Spooner, looking cross, slowly rose, and went to her room. She had scarcely reached it when Bessie followed her, carrying her hat, shawl, and gloves, that she had left behind.

"A forfeit," said Bessie, smiling, "to all those who make a mess of the drawing-room!"

"Pooh! pooh! child—tell your mother I can't be bored by such things!"

"I will be your maid, then," said Bessie; "I will just run and get myself ready for dinner, and be back again in no time."

And the pretty, smiling child was as good as her word, but the dinner-gong sounded before Mrs. Spooner had done more than change her shoes.

"Please, Ma'am," said Bessie, mimicking Susan, "I must run down and obey the gong."

"No, Bessie, don't go. How could they have dinner without asking if I was ready?"

"I must go, Mrs. Spooner, or mamma will be displeased."

"Then be so good as to say I won't have any dinner at all, unless I am waited for as I ought to be."

"Come down as you are—that is best. Let us all dine together the first day," pleaded Bessie.

Mrs. Spooner silently acquiesced in this advice, and was so far mollified on perceiving she was waited for (as the dinner was already on the table, without any of them sitting down to it), that she murmured a sort of apology.

Still more did she feel she was in the wrong when she gazed around and saw them all looking so fresh and pretty in their muslin dresses, donned as they were in such haste.

Mrs. Joscelyn was at that beautiful age of beautiful English womanhood—thirty-two. Her dress, of blue muslin, was fastened at the throat with a bow of blue ribbon, and a sash of the same colour was wound round her waist and tied with a large bow. A blue ribbon confined her hair. What with the bloom on her cheeks caused by her walk, or the haste with which she had dressed, Mrs. Spooner thought she had never seen her look so handsome.

There was also in her countenance a spirit and decision that said as plain as words could say—

"There are certain rules I mean to maintain here, which are for our happiness and comfort. I would rather lose the challenge than forego them."

Mrs. Spooner came to the conclusion, before dinner was over, that she would obey. Nevertheless, she would have a little revenge first—or rather, she would show a little spirit, too.

"Clara," she began after dinner, "I want the flag."

"What for?" asked Clara.

"I want to summon Augustus. I forgot to tell him to wear his flannel waistcoats."

"I heard you tell him that just before he left."

"Then not to wet his feet."

"He may wet his feet a dozen times over before I will incur the risk of losing our challenge."

"Oh! Clara, how unkind! Is she not unkind, Mrs. Joscelyn?"

"Don't you think your husband will consider you the most unkind to summon him over here at this time of the evening, merely to tell him what his own sense will probably suggest?"

"True. I did not think of that. But suppose we desire to hoist the flag—where can we do so?"

"Mr. Summers showed me how to do it, and said we should find a flag-staff running up by one of the trees nearest the house."

"We will go and look for it after dinner," said Mrs. Joscelyn.

Those people have the truest tact who fight with the weapons of their adversary.

Mrs. Spooner did not allude to the flag again, and ran up, when dinner was over, to dress, assisted by Bessie.

The dinner ought to be described, as that at Puff has been given.

The ladies had no soup. It is fair to presume that if they had brought with them portable soup, Susan would have taken care to wash out the saucepan before it was used.

The dinner consisted of two fowls, roasted to that nicety for which Susan was famous. Little sippets of bacon adorned them. The bread sauce was excellent, slightly flavoured with mushroom powder. They had also a beef-steak, very hot, just lightly flicked over with milk-white shavings of horse-radish, and barred across with marks of the gridiron. Potatoes delicately browned under the roasting fowls, and a dish of artichokes.

An omelette soufflé, flavoured and impregnated with apricot jam, finished the repast. Its appearance gave high satisfaction, not only because it was a dish of ravishing nature, but it was a mark of Susan's entire contentment and peace of mind. She only favoured the world with it on great and solemn occasions, when she was satisfied with all and everything round and about her.

"Really, Susan," said her mistress, "you never made a better one—or one more beautiful to look at. How it would have delighted your master!"

"It's the oven, Mum," answered Susan; "and nobody to worrit one. I had my thowts of the oven the moment I clapped eyes on 'em, Mum. And it haven't deceived me no ways. There's a power o' difference of ovens, Mum; some on 'em is as senseless as a new-born babby, and t'others is as fractious as if cutting their teeth. And I mind an oven as I once hed to cook wi', and ye waa most hae thowt it wor a Chrestian, it wor that humoursome. Hoosumdever, I mastered him. Purty things, thou'st cum tye, Suesen, says I, if thou lets an oven be masterful owre ye!"

It was not often that Susan spoke in the company of what she was pleased to term "her betters."

But as her tongue kept up a clatter like a mill-wheel at home, and she had no one on whom to exercise its power in the kitchen at Luff, she was fain to keep it in use by talking to the ladies.

The ladies having dined, and, as we have seen, fared sumptuously, the two young ladies and Bessie assisted Susan to clear away. Miss Severn undertook the care of the silver, and Miss Daintree of the china and glass, while Bessie dubbed herself mistress of the napery department. The two elder ladies took a stroll, and found the flag-staff described by Mr. Summers.

As soon as she saw it, Mrs. Spooner apostrophised it :

"Ah ! there you are ; but never—never shall you be used by me—flag-staff ! If Augustus elects a Captain Crabshawe as his companion and friend in preference to his wife, he may do so. I have my thoughts about it, but I will reserve them until we meet. My pride is too great for remonstrance now—but we shall see !"

"I don't think pride is of much use between a husband and wife, Arabella. Augustus wished to show his independence, and made use of the subterfuge of desiring an unlimited area for the purpose of smoking. You don't care how much he shows his independence, provided it is only show ; while permission to smoke for ever will probably cure him of smoking at all—but not if you continue to chafe about it."

"Submit, and say nothing ! Oh ! Mrs. Joscelyn, it is not human nature to do it !"

"I don't wish to force my advice upon you, but I certainly intend to be forbearing and merciful when the trial is over. I cannot imagine for one moment that they will remain quiet a whole month, with no other society than their own. In the first place, Captain Crabshawe is in temper as fretful as any baby, as pettish as any woman, and will resent the most trifling affront, until he tires out the best temper among them. And there is nothing in his character that will make it a gratification to bear with his peevishness rather than forego his company. He is neither clever, nor agreeable, nor good-natured. To live a whole month with such a man will send my husband home meek as a mouse, that is, if he does remain the month. Sir George and Mr. Summers have always rather disliked him. Mr. Spooner will be the last to give him up."

"Ah ! you agree with me ; his temper and Captain Crabshawe's are alike."

"Very far from it. Your husband's temper is so good that he will be the last to quarrel with him. My husband will be the first, not because his temper is a quarrelsome one, but because he has no control over it. Whatever he thinks will come out."

"Every day proves to me more and more that if a woman wishes to be happy she ought not to marry."

"And every day proves to me more and more that it is a woman's profession to marry. Men go into the army, the navy, the church ; they are lawyers, and doctors, and merchants, and in that way they make use of the talents or gifts the Almighty has bestowed on them ; while woman, in the nursery, learns to be a good daughter, an affectionate sister, which prepares her for being a loyal wife and a fond mother, and for that she was created ; for that she has been gifted with an enthusiasm you don't find in men ; with a patient and hopeful mind, that carries her through minor difficulties that no man would tolerate ; with a quickness of wit, and a courage under trials, that enables her to grapple with domestic troubles that would leave a man stranded and helpless."

"Thus, if we are tolerably well-behaved to each other, and occupy our volatile minds with plenty of woman's work, and endeavour to amuse each other with little flights of fancy, and whimsicalities that we women love, the month will be gone ere we think it has begun. But I am sorry for the gentlemen—they cannot knit, sew, sing, and play. They are but poorly gifted with the art of amusing each other. They will smoke until they are all bilious ; they will shoot until they know every rabbit left on the island ; they will play whist half the day, wrangling over it ; they will yawn over their books, and only feel pretty lively when dinner is announced."

"What a character you give of them ! Don't complain of mine for the future—you are much more severe."

"Only while they are alone, recollect. When we are with them all their better feelings are called into play. They are courteous, entertaining, excellent gentlemen. Our presence brings forth these virtues. We must certainly win the challenge—I don't see how it can be otherwise—but we must have no nonsense, Arabella."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Joscelyn ?"

"Come, give me a kiss and promise that you will be

punctual, lively, active, and, above everything, kind in your thoughts to the absent Augustus."

"He is so different from what he was."

"Oh! nonsense. He sees, as all sensible persons see, that to go on with your little love follies is simply absurd. You are his dear wife, than whom he loves nothing better. You will believe that without requiring him to go about the world proclaiming it. Did I not hear you call him 'Poppet' one day, and did not his friends laugh at him? But see, here are the girls! How I have chattered—I believe, though, sermonised. Well, maidens, have you done all your duties?"

"Yes, mother," replied Bessie, "and Susan has given us so much praise—we are quite conceited. She says if she only had us for fellow-servants, she never need scold again."

"Don't believe her—you would, at the end of a week, be in as much disgrace as Ellen and Jane. In fact, Bessie, I prophesy you will have Susan's 'mind,' which is her word for an outburst of temper, before that time."

"Then I will give her mine."

"I should like to settle some plan for employing our days," observed Clara. "They say 'man is the creature of habit.' I shall not be shocking Captain Crabshawe's feelings, three miles between us, if I presume that women share in this inference."

"I know Pussie does. See, gossip, how she is rushing in and out among the trees. Seven weeks ago she opened her eyes upon this vain but delightful world, and from that time she appointed her hours for play, her times for repose, and her moments for reflection, and never has she swerved one iota from either."

"Just like my canary, cousin. He does the same thing every day, almost at the same minute."

"Then as my gossip wishes us to imitate the wise conduct of Pussie and Dicky, proceed, aunt, with your orders, and apportion out our time."

"I think we need not be quite so particular as those beloved pets of yours. In the first place, I must not neglect Miss Bessie's education. She must go on with her lessons."

"Oh! how disagreeable! I am Mrs. Spooner's lady's-maid, and Susan's kitchen-maid. Surely I need not be little Bessie Joscelyn at school?"

"Oh, yes, do, Bessie! because it will be an amusement to me to teach you music," pleaded Kate.

"And I should like to go on drawing with you," said Clara.

"And, Bessie, I should like to teach you something," echoed Mrs. Spooner.

"Oh ! this is too bad !" replied Bessie, half-tearfully ; "if you all mean to employ yourselves on my education, I shall become too clever to bear myself."

"Don't fear, Bessie," said her mother. "Our capabilities of teaching are your safeguard, and I prophesy the lessons will be more to your mind than play. Now, let us go home, for the evening shadows are falling fast. Look, Arabella, from this point we have a perfect view of Puff, and the light from the setting sun is so strong, if we had a glass we might perhaps see our husbands walking about and smoking."

"I can see the smoke," observed Mrs. Spooner, just a little sighingly.

"We will hope that is from their chimneys, not their pipes. Blow them a kiss, as I will, I bear them no malice ; the only thing I begin to fear is that I shall like this life too well !"

"Mrs. Joscelyn," whispered Mrs. Spooner, "look at Clara, how spell-bound she is, looking at Puff ! How pretty her earnest profile is against the rosy sky !"

"Yes, I should not wonder if at this self-same hour another face is steadily looking this way from Puff !"

"But I thought they had quarrelled ; they seemed very cool to each other the last few days."

"Perhaps that was a blind. You know Clara is of a sensitive, nervous nature. If he proposed—which he may have done—she has probably deferred her answer until our trial is over. Mr. Summers is a lucky man if he gains her for a wife."

"I don't agree with you about his having proposed—or that he will be lucky if she accepts him ; she has such a touchy temper. I prefer Kate infinitely."

"Kate is nothing but a little loveable lively thing—she has not had a serious thought yet. She has not been tried as Clara has."

"I never heard of any of her misfortunes."

"She has had no startling or sudden griefs ; for her parents died while she was too young to feel their loss. But her trials have been almost worse to bear than a great grief. God, however, is the comforter of the mourner, and throws a halo of heaven round one whom He hath chastened.

But the wearisome, woeful life of a fine-hearted spirited creature, left dependant on niggardly, narrow-minded relations, is a sad lot."

"But I thought Clara was independent, and had indeed a good fortune?"

"Yes, now she has. Her story is rather romantic. We will get her to tell it to us some day."

"Oh! here is that great brute of hers, Runa—she will eat up my darling pet."

"I told Susan to let Runa loose every evening, as a safeguard."

"Gracious heavens! yes. Oh! dear! dear! I begin to feel how rash it was for us to consent to come here! How could Augustus permit me to do so mad a thing? It is becoming quite dark!"

"We shall be safe in the house. There are good locks and bolts to both doors and windows."

Once in the transformed saloon, now all ruddy and aglow with a bright little fire and two or three lamps, it had quite a home look, with the tea-things all laid, and the urn puffing and hissing; Mrs. Spooner forgot her fears.

They spent a very pleasant evening, partly enlivening it with music and singing, partly by reading aloud, and a game of cribbage for Bessie.

Prayers at ten o'clock were succeeded by a general inspection of doors and windows, after which they all went to bed, happy, but a little awed by their lonely and isolated condition.

Thus we have fairly established the Puffs and Luffs at last on their respective islands.

It must be confessed that my "Lords" and "Ladies" have nothing very remarkable about them. They are a set of people the types of whom we meet every day, and from whom we can expect nothing romantic, astonishing, or disgraceful.

We have a joyful squire, and his sensible sweet-tempered wife. We have an uninteresting couple in Mr. and Mrs. Spooner; a pair of lovers in the very crisis of one thing or the other, in Mr. Summers and Miss Severn. We have one of those pretty creatures to be met with anywhere—a lively, sunny-faced girl, just out of her teens, without a care, without a thought beyond the day; and to match her is a gay young bachelor, caught, like a moth in the flame of a candle, by her pretty, artless ways, and rebounding from the torch, lest it should be Hymen's.

Captain Crabshawe seems the only one among them all likely to make or produce a sensation ; but neither mentally nor personally is he qualified to act the part of hero. He is too much of an old woman, be it said, to act the villain's part, unless he goes into partnership with the "excellent convict."

He, that "excellent convict," alone possesses the materials for making a sensation ; and at present all of the original devil that was in him is absorbed in the delightful and rare position, for him, of being in a paradise not only of unlimited "victual and drink," but where these are of a toothsome and savoury kind.

Never had it occurred to him at any previous time, in his numerous adventures, to sit before a round of beef, with the liberty to carve for himself, and as often as he fancied ; with a large jack of beer flanking it, out of which he was free to pour as much as he pleased.

This state of things had the effect of making the only villain amongst my *corps dramatique* virtuous. He was compelled to be good, to please that part of his organisation which is the first to show itself at our birth, and the last to leave us in old age.

Human nature (once more we moralise on this interesting theme, which has occupied the world since Eve was beguiled by the serpent, and Adam was beguiled by Eve, and was mean enough to allow it)—human nature has certain rules from which she never swerves. Amongst her most arbitrary laws is that one which binds her subjects to certain habits or fancies at certain stages of their existence. Solomon, our first philosopher, has simply stated this truth by saying : "There is a time for all things." Time for mirth, for sorrow, for sleeping, for waking, for dancing and sitting still, for eating and drinking.

Carrying on this thought through all the metaphysical branches that will lead up to the most sublime conceptions, and down again to the merest statement of facts, let us bring it to bear on Scruttles—the "excellent convict."

He had had his time for picking and stealing, his time for pains and imprisonment, his time for repentance and amendment ; and now he approached that period when, according to the laws of human nature, a gastronomic mood should be the ruling passion of his life.

For the sake of plenty of "victual and drink" Scruttles was ready to forego all other pastimes in which his soul had hitherto delighted.

Rather than lose the prospect of perpetual cuts at that round of beef, and unlimited quaffs from that jack of beer, he would try to speak the truth, refrain from taking possession of what did not belong to him, and endeavour to do his duty in his present walk of life.

Thus, not even the brain of a Mrs. Radcliffe could depict, or venture to create startling events, overwhelming horrors, and distracting mysteries, as occurring to our Lords and Ladies.

With every disposition to make the most of the position in which they had placed themselves, through one of those accidental miſfs that will arise between the best-tempered of either sex, there seems little prospect of having anything to relate, but that all heartily repented the challenge—all were extremely stupid and dull—all rejoiced to see each other again; and the question upon which they split—namely, smoking—was almost entirely forgotten, until once more Mrs. Joscelyn renovated and beautified her house, and once more requested they would not contaminate her clean curtains by smoking.

Nevertheless, there is (as doubtless my dear reader has observed) a certain difference between the rulers of the two kingdoms.

Captain Crabshawe, as king of Puff, has already shown symptoms of an arbitrary and captious nature. He intends to govern his subjects by the laws of baiting and badgering.

Mrs. Joscelyn, as queen of Luff, evidently means to rule her people by the arts of gentleness and persuasive gaiety.

There can be no question as to the result; and bearing this in our mind, let us cease moralising, and prepare to go on with their history.





CHAPTER V.

PUFF! PUFF!



SCRUTTLES was not the only subject ruled by King Crabshawe, who had arrived at that phase of his existence called the gastronomic.

The squire was in the full flood-tide of dainty and appetising thoughts. When he dressed in the morning, with the first stroke of his razor he bethought him of the one cut across a kidney, to be broiled in its own gravy for breakfast ; or the first incision of the knife into a juicy, smoking beefsteak. As he pulled his socks up his well-shaped legs, he was reminded of devilled legs of turkeys ; as he saw himself in the looking-glass, getting into his clean white shirt, he regarded himself as a huge new-laid egg. In fact, there was scarcely a single phase in his dressing arrangements that did not remind him of breakfast in some shape or another.

The squire did not sell himself to the insidious pleasures of luncheon, therefore he may be pardoned if he thought a good deal of his dinner. It began to occupy his thoughts just as the remembrance of his breakfast faded away, and occupied them more or less until it was absolutely discussed and done with.

Sir George was a little fastidious about his meals, and generally devoted his attention to *entrées* and *entremets*, having a sort of feeble idea that the sight of a large joint rather repelled him than otherwise.

Mr. Spooner, on the contrary, felt that the very look of a magnificent round of beef was almost as the eating thereof. He was not exactly a Barmecide, but his enjoyment of his dinner had a great deal to do with its appearance.

As for Frank Summers, he ate what was put before him, without word or comment ; and except in the matter of

salads or fruit, seemed equally indifferent as to whether it was beef, mutton, pork, or veal.

Captain Crabshawe boasted that he could dine on bread and cheese!—on nothing! Eating was a farce—dinners a bore! Why not go to the cupboard and eat when you were hungry, without all this parade and nonsense? Nevertheless, King Crabshawe loved game and poultry in his heart. He liked to crunch their tender young bones between his great teeth, and he always took up the legs between his fingers and ate them as one supposes a Fiji would eat his wife.

With all these different tastes, imagine our dear heroes, on the fourth day of their happy sojourn on the free Island of Puff, sitting down for the fourth time to dine on that round of beef—now merely a shadow of its former self—and the gaunt bone of the now skeleton ham. No excellent roasts for the squire, no delicacies for Sir George, nothing substantial to delight Mr. Spooner, not even the bone of a peewit for Captain Crabshawe to crunch.

The squire had that ominous frown on his brow which sat there on our first acquaintance with him. No longer faultlessly dressed, he appeared to have forgotten all about the honour of dining with “Jack Joscelyn,” and was clothed in his shooting-jacket. This was in itself sign enough of the deteriorating habits of his present life.

Sir George looked as if he had just landed from off a rickety steamer, that had encountered a fearful storm. Mr. Spooner was peevish, Captain Crabshawe irritable; Frank alone cut away at the shadowy remains of the beef, as if it was the proudest moment of his life.

Behind him, holding a plate, as if he surreptitiously designed to knock the amiable Frank’s brains out with it, stood the “excellent convict.” His countenance had assumed a new and peculiar aspect; it bore the sad and wistful watchfulness of those of our ancestors who (if we are to believe “The Vestiges of Creation”) still retain their tails.

No hungry, shivering, ill-used, blighted monkey, ever cast such quick, imploring, pitiful glances, as did Scruttles, sometimes being able to take in the countenance of each master at one glance. It made him more ugly than ever.

For most extraordinary to relate, none of the gentlemen seem to appreciate “bush” cooking. To-day was the third day that they had ordered an excellent dinner, the very ordering of which gave them an appetite for it, and yet there they were, not only still dining on cold beef and ham, but almost all the rest of their provisions used up.

Yes, "used up," but never eaten. No roast legs of mutton for them—no juicy beef-steaks. The fillet of veal remained in the ashes where it had dropped—a blackened mass—and there was nothing left in the Puff larder but a neck of mutton, and the sirloin of beef that was intended for their Sunday dinner.

No wonder Scruttles looked as if he bore on his pate the united miseries of the whole monkey tribe. By the very agony he himself felt at the prospect of losing this paradise of unlimited good, he knew what his "masters" were enduring. And yet it was not his fault that, on the first day he cooked their dinner, they had forgotten to tell him that though the fashionable hour for dinner in bush life, and among convicts—excellent or otherwise—was high noon, gentlemen dined at low sunset.

Thus, when they returned from shooting—jocund and gay, hungry through very anticipation of eating the dinner they all had helped to order—was it his fault that they found it cold and miserable, as no doubt it would be, served up at one o'clock, and not uncovered until seven!

"Cold mutton is my aversion!" exclaimed Sir George.

"And covered with this beastly sauce," said the squire, "which ought to have been in a boat!"

"Was this our apple dumpling?" sighed Mr. Spooner.

"Apparently it was boiled with the mutton," remarked Frank, as he flicked off some capers from its collapsed form.

His Majesty Crabshawe said nothing, but partook of all the cold viands—even the cold potatoes and carrots, with an air of dignity and calm contentment that ought to have been a lesson to the others.

He even ate the cold apple dumpling with the deliberate care and caution requisite upon its first appearance in life, hot out of its cloth and basin.

You could have sworn that he tossed a bit of apple to and fro on the tip of his tongue, to avoid the danger of scalding that useful member.

The second day's dinner lay, as beforesaid, in the ashes where it fell, after eight hours roasting. A fillet of veal was an article of food that Scruttles now saw probably for the first time. Its pale and flaccid appearance induced him to think it would require a vast deal of cooking.

So he set it down to roast betimes; and knowing that dinner was not to be until seven, he settled in his own mind that his masters must be obeyed, notwithstanding the evident

demonstrations of the fillet of veal that it was sufficiently roasted long before.

"Ay, burn away! ye aggrawating wital, but I'm darned if you go on the table until seven strikes!"

The third day's dinner consisted of a rabbit pie, with some little extras.

The gentlemen were so far reasonable, that they duly recognised the anxious desire of Scruttles to please, who in his endeavour to anticipate their wishes, promised so much in his turn, that they were equally deceived as to what he could do.

The opening of that pie, on this eventful fourth evening, settled all question of future dinners dressed by the "excellent convict."

"It does not look much amiss outside," had the squire remarked, so he boldly inserted the knife, and a hot steam rushed out.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, his handkerchief to his nose, "what has he put in the pie?"

"Good gracious!" cried Sir George, rushing from the table, as the pungent steam penetrated his nostrils.

"Faugh! oh! ah! heaven and earth!" spluttered Mr. Spooner.

"Hah!" said Frank, ruminating. "Scruttles, before you put those rabbits into that pie, did you—did you—clean, skin, or truss, or whatever it is called—those rabbits?"

"Anan!" answered Scruttles, looking hideous with perplexity.

"Did you paunch them?" continued Frank.

"Punch 'em?" echoed Scruttles.

"Did you put those rabbits into that pie just as we gave them to you, or did you clean 'em out?" roared the squire.

"Cleaned out?" replied Scruttles, to whom the phrase seemed to have a familiar though mournful sound.

"Scruttles, my man," said the captain, "were you careful to clean and wash those rabbits before you put them into the pie?"

"Wash 'em!" and this time there was astonishment depicted in a remarkably ugly manner in the countenance of Scruttles. "Wash 'em! No, Sir, we thinks as there be no surt o' flavour in a beast like a raabbit. We do dress him all of a loomp-like, to make he tasty?"

As he spoke, the squire drew forth the entire corpse of a rabbit out of the pie, which bore a sad resemblance to a drowned cat freshly fished out of a gutter.

"Cannot your man cook?" asked Mr. Spooner, later on in the evening, as they all sat smoking.

"Sam, you mean?" said Sir George. "We will ask. That pie! ugh!"

Sam being summoned, the following colloquy took place:—

Sir George.—"Sam, can you cook?"

Sam.—"No, Sir George, but I have a good receipt for patent varnish!"

The squire.—"Sam, you can broil a mutton chop?"

Sam.—"No, Sir. But I have a rare polish for top-boots!"

Captain Crabshawe.—"Sam, can you do anything?"

Though psychologists make no mention of the fact, yet it has been undeniably proved, from past history, as well as present experience, that men are as fully slaves to certain whims and fancies as the weakest woman ever born.

The crotchet of Sir George was for his servant Sam. Any insult to himself he could have borne good-humouredly, as a gentleman should; but reflect upon Sam, and you had him, as Shakespeare saith, "on the hip!"

Sir George.—"Leave my servant alone, will you; he, at least, is respectable, which is more than can be said of that dirty, lying thief you have brought to poison us!"

Captain C.—"He does as he is bid, at all events, whereas your fellow won't even make the beds."

Sam, blubbing.—"Please — Captain — I wasn't born a housemaid, nor nothing of the sort!"

Captain C.—"Maid, sirrah! what do you mean by saying maid here?"

Frank.—"Which reminds me that none of our beds are made at present. Come along, Spooner, and let us perform that necessary work."

"It appears to me," remarked Spooner, as he assisted Summers, "that we are now verifying that proverb I have so often read in the Bible—it relates to making one's bed, you know, and lying on it."

"It's a very good proverb, but it is not in the Bible, Spooner."

"Now, is it not? I thought all good sayings came from the Bible."

"Most of them do, but there are a few worldly proverbs meandering about amongst us, that are both pithy and appropriate. What do you say to 'Too many cooks spoil the broth?'"

"My good fellow, would that we had one!"

"You and I must turn cooks. The squire's temper won't stand any more cold beef, and the ham evidently is beginning to disagree with him. When we go back, after making these beds, let us offer our services."

"But I know no more of cooking, Frank, than this bolster."

"Then the party will be broken up, the challenge lost, before a week is out, and all for so simple a reason that we could not boil our own potatoes."

"Hang it! I don't mean ever to give in. There is an oddity, or rather I should style it a tenacity, in my wife's memory, that will permit her never to forget her triumph, if she does triumph. No, no, rather than be badgered and taunted all my days, I will study cookery, and be your kitchen-maid, on any terms."

"With a cookery-book, I don't see how we can fail. Women cook by receipts, I suppose?"

"Very true, Frank; but what I fear is, we shall not understand the rudiments. Most receipts that I have seen appear to infer that we know everything already."

"Matters have arrived at that pass, we must do something. We have three more dinners to provide for, and there is nothing in the larder but the sirloin of beef and a neck of mutton."

"We have game—rabbits."

"Oh!—oh!—don't mention them!"

"We can make the rest of the beef into bubble-and-squeak."

"Where's our cabbage?—and which is bubble, and which is squeak?"

"What a row they are making down-stairs! Crab and Sir 'Folly,' as Scruttles calls him, as usual, quarrelling. We must go down and pour oil on the troubled waters."

"Very good; and remember, in offering ourselves as cooks, let us not forget to ask the gracious permission of our punctilious monarch."

"What an absurd old idiot he is! I had no idea he was so utterly ignorant, not to say illiterate."

"One can only tell a person's true character by living with him, and he certainly does not improve upon acquaintance."

"Most certainly not!" answered a crabbed voice close to them. "Follett grows a greater fool every day. He spoils the whole party with his absurd whims and tempers."

"We must bear with him, nevertheless, Crabshawe ; for if he goes home we lose the challenge."

"Humph !" growled the captain—"deuced hard to put up with him—but anything is better than giving in."

"We two wish to know whether you will accept our services as cooks."

"Excellent !—excellent !—ah, my dear fellows, you give me new life."

"You think of nothing but your stomach, Squire," again growled the king.

"Well, it is always thinking of me—we have a mutual liking for each other. Come, boys, come here, and let us talk it over."

"Without consulting me?"

"We offered ourselves to you first."

"Well, I suppose you did—go on, then."

"I propose, my dear Squire, that we have no consultation about it. Leave it to Spooner and me. We have so little left on which to experimentalise, that we are nervous, and a discussion might reveal to us such impossible ideas on your parts, that we should give up our situations at once."

"Good heavens ! no—don't do that. All I want is a hot mutton chop—that will dine me."

"A dozen you mean, Squire."

"Hot and hot, between two hot plates," quoth the squire, unheeding the interruption. "I shall be perfectly satisfied without another thing."

"We will do our best to please you. One thing is certain—all that we do shall be cleanly done."

"That's a comfort, at all events."

"I am sure Scruttles —"

"Intends that we should go to whist—come along, gentlemen. What with a reasonable amount of trumps, a steady reflecting partner, a good cigar, and a tumbler of cold whisky and water, I am happy to say I envy no man." Which cheery sentiment sounded all the more admirable from the squire's lips, suffering as he was from three bad dinners in succession.

It is astonishing what a difference it makes in a man's "physique" whether he dines well or ill. We might enter into a long dissertation, collected from history, beginning at the remotest ages, and going on through centuries of barbarism—of wars, of peace, of glory, of luxuries, arts, literature, and refinement, and winding up with the squire

as the latest known example of the power of the appetite over the mind.

Women are less influenced by the seductions of the palate.

Witness Eve, who only succumbed to the temptation upon learning that the fruit, though fair to look upon, was to be "desired" because of the rare property it possessed of being able to "make her wise." Is it not a well-known fact, that Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo because he made a bad breakfast?

But why go on, interesting as the subject may be? It is necessary that we think of nothing but our lords and ladies. Nevertheless, the few remarks above are not irrelevant. The utmost justice is intended to be administered to both parties, and the reader is requested to draw his own inferences from the fact, that the lords are starting on their trial under the most afflicting disadvantages. Their king is always out of temper, and they cannot get anything fit to eat—both evils of that kind least suited to their temperament and sex. While the ladies are coaxed into good-humour and happiness, and dine royally every day, neither of which advantages is it in their nature and sex to care much about.

Again, we might moralise upon the extraordinary whimsicalities of fortune, who will give to one that for which he has no value, while his neighbour absolutely desires it as the one necessary of life, and dies for want of it; but we will not be seduced into the mazes of thought, or the ramifications of theory. We will simply attend the *début* of the new cooks.

With a becoming seriousness, that was much applauded by the squire, Frank (we are so fond of him, we cannot help imitating his companions, and calling him Frank, though we have not asked permission to do so), Frank had tied a dinner-napkin before him, by way of apron, and had covered his luxuriant curls with a paper cap, charmingly illustrative of the real man-cook. If he took such pains, and succeeded so well in merely looking like a cook, what might they not expect from his efforts to emulate the skill of one.

Light-hearted and hopeful, the squire, the captain, and Sir George departed on a fishing expedition, accompanied by Sam, the two cooks confidently affirming that Scruttles would give them all the help they required.

About two o'clock the fishermen were to land, and send up

their fish to the house, to help out the dinner, which was accordingly done.

Upon Sam's return from taking it to the house, the squire eagerly asked how they were getting on.

"Mr. Spooner wor reading a yaller book, stretched out on the grass afore the dore, and Mr. Summers wor a-smoking 'is pipe on the balkerney, looking out on t'other hisland."

"And Scruttles?"

"He wor a-scratchen 'is hed, and luiking at the t'others."

The squire shook his head, but his great heart was hopeful. The two new cooks had promised to do their best—it would be unpardonable if he doubted their word for a moment. But it must be owned he had some qualms, as they bent their steps homeward, and seven o'clock drew near.

He would not venture into the kitchen, he might make them nervous. But he glanced at the dinner-table; it looked as neatly and deftly arranged as if the butler at Deep-Cliffs had laid it.

Up-stairs, too, unlike yesterday, and the day before yesterday, all the beds were made, the rooms tidied, and their clothes put out to change.

"Ah! ha!" exclaimed the squire, jocund, "this is something like—I could almost imagine Elizabeth had been here!"

"And who is she?" Captain Crabshawe, in endeavouring to look severely ironical, simply assumed a more vinegary aspect than usual.

His irony was lost on the squire.

"The best wife in Christendom," quoth he; "and I don't care who says —" the last word was lost in the plunge the squire made into his bath; submerging his head and face with such a glorious splatteration, such a gurgling and dousing, such a bubbling and cascading, no wonder the captain stood for the moment transfixed with astonishment. But he had to beat a speedy retreat, in order to escape being "douched" against his will.

The two cooks sensibly felt the honour done them, as John Joscelyn, Esq., appeared all smiling and *débonnaire*, dressed for the evening.

Now, whether Mr. Summers had mistaken his vocation in life, and selected to be a gentleman, and not a first-rate cook; or whether Mr. Spooner had only now discovered that, remarkable in nothing hitherto, he would have made a name and a reputation as a gastronomic regenerator; or

whether the previous dinners, being so utterly bad, made all others by comparison appear superlatively good, certainly this dinner, the *coup d'essai* of the new cooks, was a signal success.

We do not mean to flatter them by saying it was faultless. The soup was excellent—but then, taken out of its hermetically sealed tin, it only required heating, and that the saucepan should be clean, the tureen ditto and hot, and the soup-plates also; which different requirements were admirably performed.

Then came the fish. They were haddocks. They did not look nice, but they were boiled to a turn. The new cooks had forgotten that fish are served on a drainer with a napkin. But they disappeared so rapidly, having a capital sauce to help them, that there was not time to make many comments on their appearance.

And now came covered plates, between each a smoking-hot mutton-chop. The squire roared with delight, like a fine old lion as he was. His fourth chop was a little burnt.

"What matter?" quoth he; "I did not want it, only I thought it a compliment to our cooks to take it."

And now behold the crowning effort; a large dish of bubble and squeak—though still the vexed question, of which was bubble and which was squeak, made Mr. Spooner look grave. This dish caused an infinity of conversation:

"When Frank discovered the cabbages, thrust by that beast Scruttles into the potatoe sack, he exclaimed—'Now for bubble and squeak!'" said Spooner, glowing with conscious virtue and revealed talent.

"And when we perceived how little of them was fit to cook after washing and clipping, how directly I remembered Soyer's suggestion of adding potatoes to eke them out."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the squire. "Colcannon is the best dish that comes to table."

"We have nothing coming but macaroni; for in truth we had no time—we had so much to do getting everything clean and tidy."

"Why, Sam told us, when he returned from taking the fish, you were reading—and Frank ——"

"I was study the cookery-book, I daresay, Squire, and you know it is Frank's peculiar business to look out for the flag. Also the only time we had for a smoke."

"Far be it from me to say another word. I don't hesitate

to say I have dined like a king. Did either of you think of trying your hand at an omelette, now? They say it is a simple thing?"

"So it is, Squire; but if you have an omelette, you cannot have the pleasure of your cook's company to dinner. An omelette once mixed cannot be left until it is served."

"Then don't think of it, my dear Frank; I have enjoyed my dinner all the more from seeing you share it with us. I don't know when I have had such fun. Not knowing what was coming, you know, and then wondering how it would be cooked, and all being so clean and hot, and you two having done it all—why, King Crabshawe, I almost feel as if I could take you round the waist and execute a 'deux temps' with you."

"A 'dew tong' indeed!—why, Squire, I shall be surprised if you can waddle into the hall after eating such a dinner."

"My dear Crab, it has made a man of me. I know I have a good appetite, but the doctors tell me as long as I take so much exercise, and go out all day and every day, I can't eat too much. My blood circulates so fast, it is always in want of replenishment."

"Thank my stars I am in no such predicament; any morsel does for me."

"That is because your blood is stagnant, and never flows at all."

Mr. Spooner, a little gone by the head, through vanity and self-satisfaction, was rash enough to lance thus at King Crab. Every claw he possessed thrust itself out, and proceeded to nip at the unfortunate new cook.

"Come, Spoon," interposed the squire, "don't let us spoil the remembrance of our good dinner by any wrangling."

"Spoon! Mr. Joscelyn, have I not said I take it as a personal insult being designated Spoon?"

"Just like you!" growled the captain; "you are as weak as those unfortunate creatures over at Luff. Why don't I object to being called Crab? Simply because I am too sensible. I know there isn't a shadow of likeness between me and a crab—not the remotest, so naturally I don't care."

(The captain forgot Crab Vinegar).

"But you, I suppose, think you are a Spoon, and maybe there is some truth in it."

It required all the squire's influence, all Frank's amiability, all Sir George's good breeding, to assuage this quarrel.

The squire carried off the captain, and administered to him a lion lecture.

They were there as gentlemen, they met as gentlemen, they were to be treated as gentlemen. If Captain Crabshawe could not control his temper, which the squire was sorry to observe had broken bounds with all of them, why, the fairest thing to do, was to break up at once. The challenge was nothing, in fact, after all, in the squire's mind—it was only a little sort of addition to a very pleasant scheme. His heart was in the excitement of a frolic, a sort of sporting life, a time of agreeable sojourn with sporting friends. The challenge was merely to give a fillip to the whole affair. In his opinion, not worth the keeping if they were to be uncomfortable.

"I don't know what you mean by saying I quarrel with you all?"

"Then, of course, if you can't see that the moment anyone amongst us opens our lips you find fault with what we say, the best thing to do is to separate before we quarrel irrevocably, which, Crabshawe, I should really be sorry to do—an old friend like you."

"You are always talking of your Elizabeth."

"And why should I not talk of her? I love her—I am proud of her; she was always kind to you."

"She would not let us smoke!"

"And you won't let us speak! Which is worst—eh? If I came to Puff to avoid being ordered about by Mrs. Joscelyn, by the lord Harry, I am not going to be snubbed and bullied by one of my own sex!"

"Follett is such a fool, with his shirts and his man Sam!"

"The other extreme, of no shirts and a villainous-looking convict to wait on us, seems equally foolish to us."

Perhaps a glimmer of this fact lit up a transient ray of sense in King Crab's pate, or a sudden remembrance of the month's saving in board and lodging made itself felt.

"My dear Squire, I have been wrong. I ask your pardon; the truth is, being the promoter and proposer of the scheme, the responsibility has been too much for me. With all your welfares at my heart, with the wish to make you all happy, I have perhaps been too anxious."

"Ah, yes! a great deal too anxious; leave us to ourselves—let us each be happy in our own way, Crab."

"I will, Squire—I will! Henceforward I will take no trouble."

"By all means take no trouble, Crab," echoed the squire, whose good heart would not suffer him to run the chance of breaking the peace again, by any minute inquiry as to what Captain Crabshawe considered "trouble." Though he indemnified himself in private by thinking to himself :

"What an ass the fellow is !"

Meantime, Sir George and Frank had not succeeded in their mediation so well as the squire.

In truth, all unwotting, even to himself, Spooner had found cooking thirsty work, and he had just drunk himself into that phase of tipsiness which may be called the cross phase.

To all experienced in such matters, the fact will be pretty clear, that he had not taken much—the cross stage being generally the first one ; and no one would have found it out, had it not brought into exuberant life the nerve opiniatum. Elated with his triumphant *début* as a cook, the nerve opiniatum rose, defiant of all contradiction. In vain they soothed and argued. Finally, hearing the squire returning with his penitent, Frank besought the excited Spooner to come out with him and have a quiet walk and pipe, until his mood should have softened down into that temperate zone which made Mr. Spooner the amiable, but uninteresting person we have endeavoured to describe.

"No, no, Frank ! I am afraid of no man. What I say, I say and stick to. Don't think to get me out of his way. I don't want to be got out of his way !"

"That is right, Augustus !" said Captain Crabshawe. "Old friends don't want to be parted, do they ? I am sorry for what I said ; so come along, and let us have our rubber."

"Captain Crabshawe, you are a gentleman—I accept your apology ; though, as Frank knows ——"

"Frank knows nothing, but that you and I are to cook the dinner to-morrow—and there is nothing to cook."

"Well ! Frank, my boy, leave it to me. Didn't I cook you a good dinner to-day, Squire ? Didn't I, now ?"

"Then take the cookery-book, and look over a few things, while I play the first rubber : you shall cut in after."

"Very good, trust all to me, you may trust everything to me. I will engage to trust—I mean, trust to engage—every satisfaction ; excellent dinner, trust me—heart and soul altogether—trust !"

And so, not only his nerve opiniatum slept, but his whole body. He slept until bed-time, he slept as they walked

him off to his couch, and he slept the whole night through ; but he awoke in the morning unutterably miserable.

As for helping to cook the dinner, much less fulfilling his promise the night before, the sight of a cup of tea made him shiver, a slice of dry toast turned him as pale as ashes. He could do nothing but sit on the beach, holding his hot head in his hotter hands.

The squire offered his services as kitchen-maid, but Frank seemed to have no misgivings.

"That's the best-hearted young fellow I know !" said the squire fervently, as he, Sir George, and King Crab proceeded to go shooting.

"Ah !" murmured King Crab, "he is weak, very weak, with regard to the other sex !"

"I honour him for it. I like to see a young man fond of the girls. You may then be sure there is no vice in him?"

"Tis dangerous work, Squire ! The girls now-a-days are so forward ! I know some who would no more mind bringing one up for a breach of promise of marriage, than I care for knocking off the head of that rabbit."

"Then, pay the damages, George, and think you have had your fun for your money. Though, as far as I know of your fast girls, many of them make far better wives than your demure ones. I like a fine-spirited girl—provided she is a lady."

"Oh, bother ! they are all ladies now. Look at those Miss Perjinks—there's flounces and feathers for you !"

"I meant ladies in manners, Crab ! As for your flounces and feathers, to my mind they are just marks of the other sort. But some one shouts !"

They retraced their steps, and met Frank hatless and breathless ; just behind him, the melancholy Spooner, endeavouring to look excited, but having much the appearance of a fly newly rescued from drowning out of a jug of thick cream. He was rejoiced at his delivery, but still nauseated and helpless.

"A boat !" exclaimed Frank. "She comes from Luff. I can trace her track all the way from there, straight here !"

"Where ! where is she ?" exclaimed the squire, knocking everyone aside.

"Who is in the boat ?" demanded Sir George, and getting no answer.

They all ran hastily down to the landing place ; the boat was still a quarter of a mile from shore, and as there was a

current running past there, it seemed to our excited Puffites to make no way.

"Only one person in it!—an old fisherman!—a very old fisherman!—frightfully old!" Thus did they describe him.

"Well," said the squire, heaving a sigh, that was almost as powerful as a young breeze, "if Elizabeth was in any sort of hurry, she would not have sent such a rotten old chap as that!"

"Or such a rotten old boat!"

"If Arabella is ill——!"

"Be easy," said Frank, seeing Mr. Spooner unable to complete his sentence, through emotion, or the pang of some inward anguish; "if there was anything really the matter they would have hoisted the flag, as they know we have a boat."

"Probably they are tired of Luff, have given up the challenge, and gone home!"

"Just like women!" said King Crabshawe; "they can't live two days together without quarrelling, and so have broken up their party."

"I'll answer for it, no one has quarrelled with Elizabeth; but I daresay they are a bit sick of the place, and want some extra license, or a little infringement of our bargain; Elizabeth is too sensible to take any liberty of that sort without leave. What a time the old hunks is!"

"I'll take our boat, and go and tow him in."

"No, see! he knows what he is about! The current will sweep him right in—directly."

Which it did; and he was instantly boarded, to his no small alarm, by the squire and Frank. In fact, he had cause for fear; his boat was really so rotten, the squire was nearly going bodily through it!

Drawing him high and dry, they all proceeded to question him vigorously. In the excitement—which is admirable physic, administered at the proper moment—Mr. Augustus Spooner was beginning to rally from the depressing effects of his headache, and he asked after his Arabella with quite as much eagerness as any of the others.

They had pronounced the old man as rotten in personal appearance, his boat as rotten, and they now saw that he was still more rotten in intellects. At the same time, he was undergoing a trying ordeal even for a man whose brains were in perfect health.

So the squire, finding nothing could be got out of him, but a bewildered stare from one to the other, ordered

them all to be silent, while he propounded one or two questions of the simplest nature—such questions as the most decayed brain might answer.

“Did you come from Luff?”

“Ay! I be just come from Luff.”

“Did the ladies send you?”

“Anan.”

“Did the people at Luff send you?”

“The wimmen folk? Ay, her did send I!”

“Which? which? Eliz—? Mrs. Joscelyn?—Mrs. Spooner?—eh? eh?”

No answer; it was clear the old man would only answer one at a time.

“What sort of woman sent you here?”

“Her be a pratty-spoken wooman.”

“Elizabeth!—Arabella!—that pretty Kate!”

“Her be the cook, her did tell I.”

“Susan! oh! oh! oh!”

“What did she send you here for?”

“Wi’ herrings!”

“And you brought no message?”

“Anan.”

“None of the others gave you a message for us?”

“Na.”

“Did you see them?”

“Ay, twa leddies, twa gurls, a bit lassie, and cook!”

“Were they happy? Did they seem cheerful?”

“Ay! ay! skeery as larks!”

“Have you no letter?”

“Anan.”

“Did they write?”

“Ou ay! a bit paper!”

“Where—where is it?—who is it for?—what is it about?—never was such a slow old man!”

At last the precious document appeared. It was addressed to no one. The squire opened it, by force of will and character.

“Don’t give the old man what he asks for his herrings; a penny a piece is quite sufficient.”

That was the document—nothing more!

Certainly the ladies had thought of them, for they had sent the old man to them; but only to think of their pockets—only to warn them of a treachery in the matter of herrings—merely to save them a few pence!

The squire showed his lordly disgust by chucking the old

man half-a-crown, and walking off without the slightest regard as to whether he got any herrings at all.

Sir George soon followed, after extracting every morsel of intellect left in the old man's brains.

Captain Crabshawe bargained stoutly, and was the only one who looked upon the unfortunate document with a friendly eye.

The sight of the herrings, or the disappointment, brought back all Spooner's bad symptoms. He retired from the scene of action worse than ever.

King Crab, having made a capital bargain, which caused hoary tears of avarice to steal down the old man's cheeks, went after the shooters, leaving Frank in sole possession of herrings, the rotten old man, and his rotten old boat.

"Now," said that wide-awake young gentleman, "here is another half-crown for you; but sit down, and do to those herrings what is necessary before you fry them for supper."

It was wonderful how the sight of money sharpened up the old gentleman's brains. He out with the necessary implement from some extraordinary hole in his boat, and set to work at once. Meantime, Frank went to the house, and brought him an excellent refection in the shape of a bone of ham, a lump of bread, and a bottle of beer.

"Now," said he, "all this is yours if you give me an exact description of all you saw at Luff."

Frank did not think the news he extracted too dearly bought, little as it was. At least they were all well and blooming—at least they were happy and contented.

"The girls wor a sing-ging like May-birds, and they was a-chasing and a-running for a vera fun-like, and they was a-smiling and a larfing just like pussie-cats."

At last this rotten old man, with his rotten old boat, bid farewell, and Frank began to remember his duties.

He ran back to the house, and found Sam snoring before the kitchen fire; while Scruttles was most certainly in the very act of picking the lock of the door of their small cellar.

In vain he declared,

"He wor merely iling it, as t' squire had sich a mortal trouble a-opening of she."

Not a thing done; no beds made, the breakfast lying about—and the whole place precisely as they left it!

On remonstrating with Sam, he turned sulky; upon which the flow of amiability running with so swift a current through the frame of Mr. Summers suddenly stopped.

When a good-natured person gets into a rage, it is, as all

the world knows, a very serious matter. Sam was perfectly astounded. No roaring of the squire's, no bad language of the captain's, no irritation on the part of his master, ever produced such an effect on his activity. That so mild, so pleasant-spoken, so sweet-tempered a gentleman should "cuss ——" But it is not fair to enter into a minute description of his language and deportment on this memorable occasion.

Besides, we must remember he had experienced a severe disappointment. That rotten old man in his rotten old boat had given him more anguish and pain of heart than could have been supposed possible in such decayed things.

But, whatever he might have been led to say in this unfortunate moment, Sam felt he spoke the truth when he declared Sir George would discharge him if he (Mr. Summers) chose to demand it of him, and he worked like a horse on the very suggestion; while Scruttles made hideous and frantic efforts to obliterate from the mind of Summers any unpleasant idea of his honesty.

"When a quiet cove gits 'is blude hup, Sam, hit be a caution. Leastways, they allers keps their wurd. They be so unkimmon pious, they be; if they prummis as they'll heat yer 'ed hoff, they'll do hit, no matter 'ow. Now, here's t' squire; why, lor-a-mercy, he maoy a-swear 'isself blind, and there's an hend hont. But blest if hi don't think as yon Summertery ool do hall he sais, and ha deel more!"

The consequence of these feelings on the part of the two servants was that they exerted themselves to the utmost, and soon regained their lost ground.

Pleased at their efforts, at the probable prospect of being able to provide a decent dinner, though there was but little in the larder, Mr. Frank relaxed a little in his stern demeanour. He even went so far as to take Sam into his confidence, who also let him into his, which was, that his general stupidity, his carelessness, idleness, and entire absence of any good quality, were all assumed. He had no idea of his master's shutting himself up in an "hisland," with nothing to eat or drink, or any fit company to speak to.

"Not a pettercoat hany way near the place, Mr. Summers—Sir."

"Very true, Sam; but here we are going to stay for a whole month, and if you don't choose to exert yourself, and do your duty, why, your master will discharge you. He is not likely to lose his bet because his servant is impudent enough to dare to have an opinion of his own."

"Very true, Mr. Summers, Sir. I axes yer pardon, Sir; of

coarse, Sir George, 'aving a bet, must win 'is bet, Mr. Summers, Sir ; and I'll back him through thick and thin. But it's that there convict as disgruntles me, Mr. Summers, Sir. He don't agree with me, Sir—my constitootion his poot hout by him, Mr. Summers, Sir."

"You won't have to bear with him long, Sam, I am certain. He will show his true colours soon."

"Very true, Sir. Depend upon it, Mr. Summers, Sir, has he will do my best to give satisfaction, Sir."

"That's all I want, Sam."

So this evening, after (as we have seen) very stormy weather among them, we leave our dear Puffites in that happy glow of heart, occasioned by the magic words—"Forgive and forget."

They were more in love with their life of freedom than ever—more pleased with themselves and each other. Also the dinner made of nothing was capital. Lots of herrings, with plates of fried onions, that Scruttles was an adept at serving hot. Beef cutlets taken from the under side of the sirloin ; Irish stew made out of the scrag end of the neck of mutton, and an omelette handsomely made and tossed up by Sam, as a pleasing surprise to Mr. Summers.

Never were they so jovial—never had they cracked so many jokes, poking fun at each other without fear of a quarrel. But the crowning speech of the evening came from King Crab :

"Well, I am glad we have heard that the ladies are well and happy, poor things !"






CHAPTER VI.

"LUFF IT IS."

Extract from the Luff Journal.

66  HAD no idea that we were going to be so happy on this island. It has been always my opinion that for true enjoyment there ought to be a proper mixture of both sexes in society. The conventionalisms of each are so apt to increase without this mingling together, that I have held the company of petticoats only as insipid. There are certain feminalities among us that, indulged in, amount, in the mischief they do, to the magnitude of crimes.

"I am sorry to allow this of my own sex, but I have no doubt that a frank member of the other will be as ready to confess he sees as much evil in men's society where there are no females, as I see in ours without men.

"Having come to Luff with this opinion firmly settled in my mind—having voluntarily given myself up for a whole month only to the society of my own sex—I feel much pride in recording that I never was happier or more contented. It is, perhaps, rather too soon to give a decided opinion, as we have been here but five days ; nevertheless, being upon promise to write my experiences as they occur, I can only say what has happened, namely, that each day has been merrier than the last.

"We have all shaken into our places. My companions win my love and gratitude by their studious compliance with my wishes ; we have so much to do, we are never idle, and some of our duties are so novel, they please us by the very contrast they present to us.

"In addition to all this, there is something both healthy

and exhilarating in our present life. Every breath we draw is accompanied by that subtle essence of the happiness of living and existing which gives so much buoyancy to the frame, and which none but the perfectly healthy ever feel.

"We rival with each other as to who is to be in the sea first ; we breakfast at eight ; by ten o'clock our palace is all in perfect order, dinner settled, and no care on our minds but that of imbibing and imparting fresh knowledge to each other. We discover so much that is curious and hitherto unknown, that our studies are as entertaining as a romance.

"At one we dine ; at three, our house again in order, we go out, and pursue our studies by the sea-shore. Here we make discoveries in the earth, the sea, the air, that leads even my volatile Bessie to reflect. And she learns with pleasure what she formerly regarded as an irksome task.

"Not all my lectures could fix on her mind the sublimity of Milton's blank verse. She required a rhyme to remember any poetry. Now, only this morning, as she watched the little floating clouds, like the dropt garments from an angel's form, reflecting their fleecy lightness on the sea's mirror—when she noticed the wonderful regularity of the little gentle waves, laying their creamy fringe at her feet—the beautiful contrast of their colour, with the tawny sand, its picturesque ornamenting of shells, sea-weed, pebbles, and ocean treasures—I heard her murmur to herself—

" ' These are Thy wonders ;
Almighty ! Thine this universal frame ! ' "

And her vexation when this evening there steamed into Exe Bay a huge double-funnelled steamer, which made such a commotion before she settled herself in her anchorage, that the little waves hurried one after another in heedless haste, and threw themselves, as it were, for protection from some sea-monster, on to our little island. For my part, I do not think she mars the scene. She is the living link between us and the world. She has placed herself there, midway between us and the other island of Ribble. Her grand presence imposes a sort of calm and confidence ; marvellous as is her structure, her size, her power, yet a silken thread seemed to guide her in and out among the islands.

"To be sure, her smoke was ugly and black, but that has now floated far away, and hangs a long black line upon the most distant horizon, and a little feathery cloud, as light as those angel garments, alone floats up into the deep blue sky

of night. Her light is like a friendly beacon, and her tall and faultless spars, seen through the moonbeams, seem like warriors guarding us in our sleep.

"But I have not finished our day.

"We wander home again at six, to prepare for tea. At this time, those who have discovered treasures arrange them and put them away.

"Clara adds some new treasure to her tank of molluscs, and Kate sorts her shells, and Bessie presses her sea-weed, leaving to me and Arabella the preparations for tea. This meal is the only one which is entrusted to our charge. The girls and Susan do all the necessary work of the other two.

"So we endeavour to show our appreciation of the trust by various little surprises, and a great attempt at decoration. Sometimes each has her pat of butter placed on a green leaf, of great freshness and beauty; again, by each plate there may be a little nosegay, wherein the sand-rose, carefully denuded of its clusters of thorns, adds a wonderful grace and beauty to the somewhat meagre collection of sea-flowers.

"Sometimes we break out in a fine display of cakes, and as for our skill in shaping butter, it almost equals the art of Chantrey. Birds' nests with little yellow eggs, baskets with tiny pretended apples and pears, twisted serpents, and true lovers' knots, in every variety. It is really quite an anticipated pleasure among the young ones, conjecturing under what form this desirable condiment will be offered to them. To be sure, such pleasures are very simple, but we have Nature as our great mother-teacher, so we laugh and are happy.

"After tea, we stroll out again, and in the quiet silent twilight we discourse largely of matters we do not even think of in the broad daylight.

"We conjecture all sorts of things of the worlds that live up in the stars; we hazard some mysterious idea that was born in and nursed in our minds, regarding unseen things. We become confidential, and, drawing back from the pellucid gleam of a moonbeam, we tell of feelings that hitherto have only been known to God and ourselves. And when our hearts become full, and words are wanting to express the thoughts burning within us, we muse and silently speak to God and the night.

"Suddenly a joyful bark prepares us for the coming of Runa, sent by Susan to tell us it is nine o'clock. Mignon springs out of her mistress's lap, where she has been snor-

ing in truest dog repose, and shrieks a little welcome. The two, matching in kind but belying it in appearance, proceed to have a game of play, which lasts all the way home. They are so different in every respect, that the great double-funnelled war-steamer, just come to anchor in the bay, might as well single out a little coble and have a romp about in the sea with her.

"Now we have music. Bessie coaxes some one to play chess with her. I am writing. The gentle but solemn feelings of the twilight have not lost their power. We welcome the hour of prayer as the proper finish to a day of calm happiness, and we lose the fear of being lonely and somewhat helpless in the perception of God's presence. Night is but the unfolding of His wings, beneath which we sleep as children guarded by their mothers.

(Signed)

"ELIZABETH JOSCELYN."

"I cordially subscribe to every remark made by Mrs. Joscelyn in this journal. I never was so happy or contented. Indeed, I never felt so well—and I begin to think that perhaps one may coddle too much. Nevertheless, I hope Augustus has been careful not to wet his feet, and that he remembered to put on his flannel waistcoats. Poor Augustus! I wonder how he gets on! Badly, I should say. Under no circumstances can I imagine Captain Crabshawe's company making up for mine. No, indeed! I am not naturally vain, but when Augustus says from his heart he prefers that man to me, then—we shall see. I make no complaint, and don't intend to do so; but a worse temper, or an uglier man, I never saw.

"Mrs. Joscelyn says I must not be personal, and the above sentence must be scratched out as too much so. But we promised to write the truth, and I write the truth. If anybody is offended, all I can say is, so much the better for me and Augustus.

"Mrs. Joscelyn has omitted to describe a most fearful alarm that we had yesterday.

"I was looking out of my bed-room window, when I saw a boat approaching with a man in it. I screamed with surprise and rushed down-stairs. 'Hide! hide!' I exclaimed, 'a boat—a boat is coming—a man in it—perhaps two or three more lying at the bottom. We are lost!—lost!'

"I nearly fainted, screaming 'Augustus! Augustus!' Yes, in that hour I felt, Augustus, what it was to have a manly protector—and you were absent! Mrs. Joscelyn and

Susan went to face the enemy, apparently without fear. Clara followed with Runa. In a few moments Susan returned for a dish—laughing !

"The boat contained only one man, desirous of selling us some herrings.

"I went down to see him—he certainly was an old man—a very old man ; there was nothing to fear from him. As Clara said, he was the most uninteresting old thing ever seen, wholly given up to avarice. I shall never forget his disappointment at not being able to deceive Susan.

"‘There, Mum !’ said she to me, ‘he had the imperance to ‘ax me five shillin’ for that lot. “No,” says I, “may I niver see a ‘erring again if I gives yer more nor two.” And two he tuk. Missus is avising him to go to Puff ; being as master is clean mad on ‘errings, and will think noffin of eating a dizin. And he be agoing. But I’ve got Miss Bessie to writ a word to pa of his hextortionary, I have. Noffin aggerwates me as hextortiony.’

"Is it not strange that servants will use hard words, without knowing how to pronounce them—or their meaning, even ? The first morning after we arrived I felt very far from well, and was inclined to lie in bed, but that I fancied Mrs. Joscelyn would be nervous ; no doctor to be had—no good advice. So I exerted myself, and was nearly dressed when Susan came in.

"‘Well, Mum, so you be up at last—and very moosily you do luke to be sure !’

"‘Moosily ! Susan, what do you mean ?’

"‘Well, Mum ! I means as you do luke good-for-nothing like ; and there’s mistress have been in the sea, and she have dressed the breckwist, and she and Miss Bessie have made their beds and redded their room, and they be luiking just for all the world as fresh as currant-jelly, Mum !’

"I own the idea of making my own bed was not pleasant to me ; but as we need not tell anyone of it, perhaps it does not matter. I should have thought another servant—but I must not forget a most interesting story—dear Clara’s. I know she will forgive me, for she has a noble heart, therefore I will confess that there were one or two little things in her character I did not like. She permits me to write down her story ; I wish to keep it by me, that it may remind me now and then of her true worth.

"And as it is scarcely possible to have more to relate in the monotonous lives that we lead, but that we are wondrously happy, remarkably so, I shall conclude my little addi-

tion to the journal by merely stating that I had another serious alarm this evening. A great huge smoking, paddling, boiling steamer came into the bay this evening, rushing about with such speed, strength, and recklessness, I could not help fancying she would bump against our island and knock it over. However, there she is now, lying as still and calm as if asleep. Over the water comes the sound of voices, and her watch-light is reflected on the ocean, far away. She really looks like a friend watching us."





CHAPTER VII.

CLARA'S HISTORY — WRITTEN DOWN FROM MEMORY BY
MRS. SPOONER.

CLARA'S parents were well-born, and her father was wealthy. Her mother had very few near relations, and only brought her husband a fortune of one thousand pounds. But that was not considered an impediment to the marriage, as Mr. Severn had enough for the style in which they desired to live.

"Fifty years ago money went further than it goes now, and people with a thousand or fifteen hundred a year were enabled to live as well as people do now with twice that income.

"Mr. Severn had three brothers younger than himself ; if he had no son his estate was to go to his next brother, and then the entail ceased. He could leave it to whom he pleased — male or female.

"Clara was a first child, and when she was three years old, and no companion came, no heir, Mr. Severn bethought him that he must make some provision for her, besides the thousand pounds that was her mother's.

"He had made all the necessary preliminaries for insuring his life, for he had no power to assign her an annuity from the estate, when the promise of an heir made him pause.

"Three times in the course of the next five years did his wife bear him a dead child, which was so great a vexation to him, that, catching a low fever then going about the country, he was in no condition of mind or body to fight against it.

"Had he been in good heart, cheery and hopeful, there was no doubt but that he might have recovered. But he was no sooner taken ill, than he gave himself up to die, saying that his child was all along destined to be a beggar and an

orphan, and a beggar she would become—which was the case—for he died hopeless and desponding, not even endeavouring to make matters better by sending for his next brother to entreat him to befriend his little orphan.

“His wife followed him within a month. Her health had long been broken; some insidious disease sapping away not only the foundations of her own life, but destroying the germ of life in the unborn before they had even seen the light.

“Mr. Ambrose Severn, the second brother and heir, was an eccentric, strange individual—considered to be almost insane by the rest of the family.

“He was a bachelor, and lived alone and secluded in a little cottage on the coast; where his sole amusement seemed to be to examine the contents of all that the fishing cobbles brought home.

“He wore a long beard, which was a rare thing in those days, and he was very untidy in his habits and person.

“Altogether his family cared not to speak of him as belonging to them, for they were truly ashamed of him and his odd ways.

“Nevertheless, the fishermen and the poor about always gave him a good word for kindness of heart, though they acknowledged.

“‘He worn’t respectable loike.’

“Now, he was heir of the Oldburn estate, and the guardian of a little spoilt girl eight years old. For Clara says no parents ever lavished more fondness on a child than hers did. She was in all respects treated like a little heiress, and not only denied nothing that she might fancy, but was never contradicted. She was a high-spirited, healthy, romping girl, and had only one wish ungratified, namely, that she was not a boy.

“When Mr. Ambrose Severn arrived, he found her screaming with part passion and part anguish. Her mother was too ill to see or soothe her, and her uncles Charles and Edwin were counselling that she should be well whipt. They were both married men, with children of their own, and both in needy circumstances. They were very humble and fawning to the brother they had hitherto despised, and they showed him various letters of their elder brother’s, wherein he had sent them timely presents of money, and had always been most liberal and kind to them.

“If this was meant as a hint to Mr. Ambrose, he did not take it. Even after four days, when the funeral was over, and there was no excuse for them to remain longer, he does

not appear to have said a single kind word to anybody—not even the widow; for though he told her she need not leave Oldburn, he added:

“‘You won’t trouble me long, you will soon be by Giles.’”

“Which words proving true, once more the three brothers met to lay the wife by the husband. On this occasion Mr. Ambrose said,

“‘Which of you will take charge of that girl?’”

“They both remained silent.

“‘She has from her mother one thousand pounds; this will produce, at four per cent. (if we can get it), about forty pounds a year. I will make the allowance up to one hundred a-year if you will carry her off at once.’”

“They both exclaimed, eagerly, that they would take her there and then.

“‘You can’t both have her—but take her year and year about.’”

“And so thus it happened that this unfortunate Clara, high-spirited and intelligent beyond her years, and yet a spoilt darling, was suddenly given up into the hands of those who cared no more for her than that she brought them one hundred a-year. I am sure there were tears in all our eyes, and I sobbed outright, as she gave an account of her reception at her first new home. I feel certain she exaggerated nothing; she has too fine a heart to say even as much as she might.

“Poor little desolate child!—sick at heart, pining for one kind word, just torn from everything she most loved, from all she had ever known, and taken from a beautiful and happy home to a wretched little mean villa in the environs of London, what fate could have been more forlorn?”

“They arrived late at night, and of course, though Mrs. Charles Severn expected her husband, time had not been given to tell of the child.

“She was one of those poor, weak, muddling women that have no idea of how to act under a surprise.

“‘Dear me, Charles!’ she said, ‘what is that?’”

“‘Our little niece Clara.’”

“‘And what is she here for?’”

“‘She is going to live with us.’”

“‘Dear me!’”

“Though we all laughed as Clara told of this scene, and mimicked her aunt’s dull quiet tone, I felt I could have beaten the woman. There she sat staring at the dear little creature, until her husband said sharply,

“ ‘Well, are you not going to give the child some tea, and order her a bed ?’

“ ‘Your tea is ready, Charles !’

“ ‘The same will do for us both, I suppose ; ring the bell for it. And now, where is she to sleep ?’

“ ‘I don’t know, I’m sure. Can she sleep with ours ?’

“ ‘They are three in a bed now, ain’t they ?’

“ ‘Yes, but there is Bob !’

“ ‘Bob has only a sofa.’

“ ‘There’s the loft !’

“ ‘But no bed in it.’

“ ‘And the parlour !’

“ ‘Pooh, pooh ! do exert yourself, and go up-stairs and consult nurse.’

“ Before Clara had swallowed a cup of tea, the only thing she could take, a great bold-looking woman burst into the room and said,

“ ‘I didn’t hire myself to wait on hanybody’s child, Sir ; I expect my wages riz if I am to be bothered with more nor I hengaged for !’

“ ‘We will talk of that to-morrow, nurse. Meantime, prepare a bed ; the child is tired.’

“ ‘Missus says she is to sleep with me, Sir.’

“ ‘I will not !’ interrupted Clara.

“ ‘And I will not neither, Miss—you may take my word for it.’

“ It was more than an hour before anything was settled between the nurse and her mistress, during which time Clara roamed through the little dirty tea-caddy of a house, and sat down to cry with horror at the prospect before her.

“ In a common turn-down bedstead lay three ugly children sound asleep ; the room itself was so small, it was nearly filled by the bed. In an adjoining room was a similar bedstead, on which the nurse slept. Clara peeped into a sort of odd closet on the stairs, and saw a great huge boy, with staring eyes and frightful shocks of red hair, lying on a sofa, from which the clothes seemed ever to be falling off.

“ The fate of the poor little girl that night was to fold herself up in a warm shawl, and doze before the nursery fire.

“ But the miseries of that time were nothing to what followed.

“ Accustomed to be nicely washed and dressed every day, the poor child felt all the horrors of utter neglect. In addition to which, all her clothes were taken from her, and those that her young cousins could wear were given to them. Day

after day she had to put on the same things, until she loathed to dress herself in them.

"It was not as if in this matter she was neglected and her cousins cared for. Mrs. Charles was wholly without any idea of order and tidiness; in fact, she had few ideas of any kind, and merely sat crouching over the fire, wondering at everything.

"Economy of a sordid and unhealthy kind pervaded the parlour, while the servants indulged in wasteful extravagance in each of their departments. There were but two—both of them the worst specimens of their class.

"The year that Clara spent with this wretched family was so miserable, we could see her shudder at the recollection of it. And she looked forward to the period of going into the country to her uncle Edwin's as an escape from torture.

"She remembers well the bitter anger she felt at being sent down to him with scarcely a shoe to her feet, and with so scant a modicum of clothes, that, pale, thin, and miserable as she was, she could lift the little bundle with ease.

"Her uncle Charles had given orders that such should be the case; he had even abstracted something from the tiny bundle as unnecessary.

"'Ah!' he said, 'Edwin never sends me a goose or a turkey, or a crock of butter from his flourishing farm; he shall furnish the child with a good stock of clothes against she returns.'

"It would seem that the one brother knew the other well. For though her uncle Edwin bought her new and warm clothing, she heard him tell his wife to be careful to lock up what the child brought with her, so that she might return to 'Charles' just as he sent her to him.

"Nevertheless, in the more healthy and wholesome life she led at Newlands Farm, she grew so quickly that she could not wear the things in spite of any order.

"Though she was happier by comparison with the Edwin family than with the Charles's, it was only by comparison. Mr. Edwin had married very much beneath him, and though his wife was an excellent farmer's wife, she was a rough uncouth woman at the best. And unfortunately her children partook of her nature more than their father's. The little delicate, gently-nurtured girl, refined and sensitive beyond her years, had to endure much misery at the hands of her vulgar aunt and her rude boisterous children. She was an object of keen envy and dislike on the part of them all, their mother included. For her uncle Edwin, struck with the

contrast between his own children and the little lady-like Clara, was always drawing comparisons. This not only made him harsh and displeased with his own children, but angry and sharp with his wife. Though the fault was his own, that he had married beneath him, he visited the effects of it on his wife and children ; while they in their turn resented all his ill-humour upon the unhappy little Clara.

"With no companion but an old sheep-dog, that was useless about the farm, the poor little thing would beg a bottle of milk and a bit of bread from the dairy-girl, and wander away into the woods and by the river the live-long day, creeping in at night and running up to her little bed to hide herself there.

"It was during this period that she made herself so well acquainted with all those secrets of natural history with which she delights us now.

"I must pause for a minute to express my astonishment at the wonderful things she not only tells us of, but shows.

"I thought her idea of the turf gemmed with flowers being nature's tapestry, very pretty ; and when I questioned anything in nature being so beautiful as art could make it, she pointed out our little dell with its seven springs of water, urging me to say what in art was more lovely. I could think of nothing then. Mrs. Joscelyn says that art has so far the advantage of nature, that it need copy only what is beautiful. At present I wonder if I, situated as Clara was, should have turned for comfort to such things ?

"But to go on with her story.

"After being bandied from one to the other in this fashion, until she could endure it no longer, she took the resolution to write to her uncle Ambrose, and without complaining of her miserable life, simply asked to be sent to a school, as she had never been taught a single thing of any kind at either Hume Villa or Newlands Farm.

"She had no answer to her letter, but at the end of a fortnight a cab stopping at the door, an elderly mild-looking woman in spectacles stepped out of it, and inquiring for Mr. Charles Potts, showed him a letter from his brother Ambrose, wherein he desired their niece Clara to be given up to the care of Miss Wailes, governess of a small girls-school at Putney.

"There was, of course, a great row made, and it was doubtless soon known to both her uncles that Clara had written to her uncle Ambrose, for she received very harsh letters from them both.

"The school to which she went was by no means fitted for a girl of her birth and talents ; but Miss Wailes was a good motherly woman, and Clara, with that courage and resolution which belong to all fine natures, educated herself, in spite of every impediment, by sheer force of will.

"Her Christmas holidays she spent with Miss Wailes, who received so much a week extra for her board and lodging. Her summer holidays she passed alternately at either Hume Villa or Newlands Farm, where her uncles were paid in the same manner as Miss Wailes. But in no instance did it ever appear that her uncle Ambrose ever spent one shilling beyond the hundred pounds appointed for her use.

"Thus the poor child went sadly bare of even clothes, not to speak of the little simple luxuries of a child's fancy. When Clara was about fifteen years old, she learnt accidentally that her uncle Ambrose had a very great dislike to her. She knew he had taken to very miserly habits, and the eccentricities of former years had almost become sins. But why he should dislike a girl he had never seen since she was eight years old, was inconceivable. She pondered over the thought for some time, and came to the conclusion that his mind was being prejudiced against her by her other uncles.

"They no doubt speculated as to who should be his heir—for if he went on leading the life he now did, it would not last very long.

"Under these circumstances, she wrote a little simple girl's letter, saying that she had heard he did not like her, for which she could not but be very sorry, and she wished he would give her some opportunity to remove the impression. She received no answer to this ; but one day being at Hume Villa, she heard her cousin Anne laughing immoderately at an oldish man, who, struggling to get in at the gate, had caught his coat in the latch and torn it from top to bottom. His dismay and anguish were so visibly expressed on his countenance, that this ill-mannered girl could not help laughing.

"Clara ran out, and taking him by the hand, led him into the parlour, and offered to mend his coat as well as she could.

"He was a miserable looking old object, though scarcely so old as weak and sickly. She folded a cloak round him, and sat down to stitch up the rotten old coat—only interrupted now and then by Anne and Sarah, her cousins, who came in by turns to laugh at her. Also she was confused by the watchful eyes of the old man.

"Suddenly she threw down her work ; she ran to him and said—

"‘Uncle—Uncle Ambrose, did you get my letter?’

"‘So you know me, child?’

"‘Yes ; but you have now no beard—you looked like papa my dear, dear papa !’

"‘Well, since you know me, don’t tell the others. I’ll e’en go home again, now I have seen you.’

"‘And did you come only for that? Oh ! uncle, let me go home with you, and nurse you—you look so ill, and have such a cough.

"‘But you are a fine lady.’

"‘Am I? But I will love you, if you will let me.’

"‘You have a bad temper.’

"‘I believe it is not good, but I should never be disrespectful to you.’

"‘You are very extravagant.’

"‘How can I be that, uncle? Once I had a whole shilling.’

"‘How did you spend it?’

"‘I bought Miss Wailes a little ink-bottle with fourpence, and if you please, uncle, the remaining eightpence went partly in a pair of gloves, in which to go to church, and—and a little bit of pink ribbon to tie round my throat. I never had any ribbon before.’

"‘And how many silk frocks have you?’

"‘Oh ! uncle, a silk frock !—that is amusing ; I have only two frocks in all the world—one is a linsey, for which aunt gave eightpence a yard two years ago, and it is so small—oh ! so small, I am ashamed to wear it—and the other is this.’

"And she spread out to his gaze a threadbare, faded, old stuff gown, that no servant would have worn.

"‘Then you are sly, and tell falsehoods.’

"To this Clara made no reply. She took up the coat, and though her face burnt with blushes of indignation, she said nothing.

"At length the coat was finished, and she held it up for him to see. He silently put it on, coughing painfully all the time.

"‘Uncle Ambrose,’ she said gently, ‘let me bring you a cup of tea. My uncle and aunt are not at home, but Anne has the keys.’

"‘I know they are out—I want no tea. Here, take this.’

"It was a bank note.

“‘I should like it so much!’ she exclaimed joyfully, ‘but oh! uncle, say that you do not think me sly and false!’ And the tears filled her eyes.

“‘No, my dear—but I wish your father had lived.’

“‘Will you be my father? I will love you so!’

“‘I must go away now, but I will think of it—meantime, buy yourself a silk frock.’

“‘A silk frock! Oh! how happy I am! I shall now be like a lady!’

“‘Which I wish you to be, my dear. A sad change has come over me lately—I am not long for this world.’

“‘But if you will let me be your nurse I will soon make you well.’

“‘God bless you! my dear. I have been a fool. Don’t tell anyone I have been here.’

“‘But that will be sly, mean, dear uncle—let me tell!’

“‘They will put me in a madhouse, perhaps. Your uncles are violent men. They are without scruples—they have lied about you.’

“‘Take me home with you now. I will be ready in a minute. I will take such care of you! No one shall put you in a madhouse if I am by.’

“‘Come, my dear, come—that will be the very thing.’

“‘I will send for a cab?’

“‘Yes, my dear, yes—with a good horse. Let us get away quickly!’

“Clara ran to obey him, sending the servant for a cab. Then folding up in a paper parcel the little that she wanted, she returned to her uncle again, with whom she found her two cousins; they were angrily remonstrating upon his staying so long in their parlour.

“‘I am going to take him away now, Anne, so leave the room.’

“‘Leave the room indeed, Miss Impudence! Is that the way you speak to me, whose papa keeps you out of charity!’

“‘Don’t listen to what she says,’ pleaded Clara to her uncle, with a look on her face as much as to say—‘she does not know it is Uncle Ambrose she is speaking to. You see,’ she added, with a smile, ‘we are, some of us, not very good-tempered.’

“He smiled too, and looked at her wondrously pleasant, so that Clara hoped he did not hear the two naughty girls.

“The cab now coming to the door, she hastened to get

him away, her ill-mannered cousins following them to the very door.

"Just as they entered it, Anne espied the little bundle, and cried out—

"'Oh ! thief ! thief ! what are you taking away ?' and pulled at her to snatch it away.

"Then the old gentleman sternly rebuked them, and said—

"'Tell your father, when he comes home, that his brother Ambrose has been here, and has taken away to live with him the girl he has ill-treated and maligned !'

"The cab driving away, the last Clara saw of her cousins was both of them standing like statues of horror, looking after the cab.

"'Now, my dear, go to the Great Western Station, and take our tickets quickly for home ; I must get there to-night—I must get to the protection of my servants and friends, and my good dog, otherwise my brothers will catch me and put me into a madhouse.'

"And he trembled, as a man might do shuddering with fear.

"Oh ! how delighted Clara felt that at last she should see her once-loved home, the remembrance of which had never left her. All her past sorrows fled before the delight of the anticipation.

"Worn out with excitement and fatigue—for it seemed her poor uncle had walked almost all the way to town—he slept the greater part of the journey. At the end of two hours and a half, Clara supposed they would be nearing the station that they were to stop at, for of course everything was greatly altered in the eight years of her absence. But she did not awaken her uncle in time.

"This turned out very fortunate, for it seemed that her uncle Charles, coming home so immediately after they left, and hearing his daughters' tale, conceived the idea of catching them before they should reach Oldburn. He telegraphed to the proper station to have them stopped, but as they did not get out there, of course there was no one to be stopped. When he arrived by the next train, accompanied by a doctor, a friend of his, and a keeper from Hanwell, he learnt this piece of news. Nevertheless, he took a fly, and went on to Oldburn, where he heard that the old squire (as he was called) had left home a fortnight before, and had not returned.

"Mr. Charles went back with his companions to town in a

very bad way, for he concluded that his brother and niece had in reality never quitted London ; and where he was to find them in that monstrous place, was past his calculations. He wrote to his brother Edwin to join him, that together they might concert some scheme so as to separate the young girl from her uncle.

“ ‘ For you may be certain that, if she lives with him, she will be sole heiress, and we shall have nothing.’ ”

“ Mr. Edwin obeyed the summons, and together they had long consultations.

“ Meantime, Clara and her uncle stopped at a station that was beyond theirs by about fifteen miles. And not thinking it well for her uncle to travel further that night, Clara persuaded him to stay at the little inn close to the railway, intending to return to their proper station the next morning. But, as fate would have it, they were met at the door by no less a person than Mr. Joscelyn, who knew Mr. Ambrose perfectly well.

“ Nothing would satisfy this kind hospitable man but that they should get into his carriage, then at the door, and go home with him. The next day he would drive them to Oldburn through the woods.

“ ‘ You may do as you like, Ambrose,’ said he ; ‘ but I am going to take my old friend Giles’ daughter to be introduced to my wife.’ ”

“ And so they accepted the kind, friendly invitation.

“ And now think of Clara’s happiness—think of the ecstasy of being welcomed by Mrs. Joscelyn, of the beautiful room, the order, the freshness, the luxury of everything around her. How her heart leapt to meet it all, as her proper sphere ! How she remembered everything—the little niceties, the pretty refinements, the delicate charms of a luxurious happy English home !

“ ‘ But in the middle of it all,’ interrupted Mrs. Joscelyn, ‘ when every pulse was beating with an almost painful excitement of happiness, she did not forget her sick uncle. She assumed her place at once as his guardian and nurse, and you would have supposed the dear child had lived with him all her life, so intuitively did she seem to anticipate his wishes. ‘ He is like papa, you know,’ she said. ‘ Everything that papa liked I remember vividly.’ ”

“ The delight of the poor heart-sick Ambrose, you may conceive ; for after all, my dears, that was the real cause of all his eccentricities—his heart was too sensitive. He confided his story to Mr. Barton, the clergyman, before he died,

who told it to us after he was dead. He was a shy, nervous boy, and as these four brothers lost their mother early, they were badly brought up, for their father only cared for the eldest son, Giles. So Ambrose grew more shy and reserved every year, just as every year he felt the more necessity to have something to love. He unfortunately fell into the hands of a handsome but rather forward farmer's daughter, who, taking advantage of his weak though good heart, meant to end their flirtation by a proper marriage.

"As is generally the case with shy natures, Ambrose was very proud, and he resisted her arts much longer than she expected. She resorted to a great many. They used to meet in a little wood, which, situated four miles from Oldburn, was only separated from her father's farm by an orchard, a sloping meadow, and the river, which was crossed by stepping-stones. These were built up a good height, as the least rain flooded the river, which was rather narrow at this point.

"Amelia, or Mella, as she was usually called, always crossed the stepping-stones to meet her gentleman lover, and she often told him if he would not marry her she would throw herself off them, and drown herself before his eyes. At this he would smile, saying, 'She should not drown while he was near to save her.'

"One evening she almost tore from him a vow never to meet her again, she was so urgent and mad upon marriage. He would not consent, and she became so violent, they parted on the worst of terms, and she ran across the stepping-stones, as if fleeing for her life from him. He saw her safely over them, and then went home. For three days he never visited their trysting-place. He was endeavouring to school himself into giving her up. Though he had no one else to turn to, he was conscious that she was not the sort of person he ought to have even for a friend, much less a wife. They had none of them been taught any religion, so it was only that inherent love of virtue or self-respect that urged him to go on no further with this girl, to his own hurt, and her ruin.

"He thought it but manly to go and tell her his decision himself. He waited long in the wood, but she did not come. So he decided to cross the stepping-stones, and go to seek her father's house. As he stepped between the two middle stones, something in the river attracted his attention. He looked down, and, surging up through the water, the drowned face of poor Mella met his own. She lay there jammed in

between the two stones; he gave a loud and horrified cry, which brought the farmer and his men to the spot instantly. Fortunately for Mr. Ambrose, Mella had been missed by her family since the evening before, and the people were all out looking for her. They had seen Mr. Ambrose go into the wood with his book, and they had watched him cross the ford, and instantly conjectured the reason of his cry. Thus he was no more concerned to their minds in her dreadful death, but in having found the body. He did not think so himself.

"The jury summoned by the coroner decided that she had foolishly crossed the stepping-stones late at night, and had accidentally slipped in. Perhaps she would not have been drowned, but for the circumstance of being jammed in between the two stones, whereby she was suffocated before she could extricate herself.

"But Mr. Ambrose never entertained this idea for a moment in his heart. He considered himself answerable for her death, and no other mode of atonement suggesting itself to his mind but the heathen one of self-torture, he vowed from henceforth to forfeit all his privileges as a gentleman.

"He would cease to dress as one, or live the life of one. The poorest labourer on his father's estate should be better clad and better fed.

"No doubt there was a great deal of real eccentricity in this, which was sufficiently notorious, when he was only a younger son, on but a small allowance.

"But when he became possessed of Oldburn, with a yearly income of fifteen hundred a year, and went about almost in the garb of a beggar, and was known to live almost entirely on the mere scraps left from his servants' meals, people shook their heads and thought him really mad.

"Two people only held a different opinion—one was Mr. Joscelyn, and the other Mr. Barton, the rector of the parish. The former argued that a man was mad when he did mischievous and wicked things, whereas no one could live a more harmless and quiet life than Mr. Ambrose. He was good to everyone but himself. While Mr. Barton had even greater reason to think that some heavy mental grief oppressed him, rather than any disease of the brain; for he acted and spoke as a man atoning for some great sin. He was liberal to the poor, generous to his servants, and if he had been niggardly towards his niece Clara, it was as much from ignorance of her real wants, as fear of getting into the hands of his two brothers.

"In fact, but for Mr. Barton and Mr. Joscelyn, they would have taken possession of him and Oldburn long ago, under the plea that he was insane.

"This fear of his brothers so haunted him, that the only hatred he possessed in his heart was towards his heirs.

"After receiving Clara's last letter, he was urged in his conscience to go and see her.

"His opinion of his brothers was such, he felt she might be their victim as well as himself. But true to his vow, to allow himself no more indulgence than the poorest labourer, he had walked nearly all the way to London.

"What happened there has been recorded.

"And now Clara returned to the beloved home of her childhood.

"It is impossible to express her happiness, or the happiness that she gave her uncle Ambrose the few years he lived. Their only grief was the state of his health, which long years of remorse and penance had so impaired, he could not hope to live long, even loved and tended as he was by his darling Clara. It was the prettiest sight to see them together. It even disarmed those two dreadful brothers, who came down more than once on their old scheme of proving him insane, or taking her from him.

"Such was her firmness, good sense, and fearlessness of them, as she faced them with her arm round 'Papa Ambrose's' neck—so she called him—such his happiness, content, and perfect freedom from all eccentricities seated thus, that they saw at once and for ever they had better go back and struggle with the world, regardless of any hope of heirship.

"And so far they were better off; for many handsome presents found their way up from Oldburn to the poky dingy Hume Villa, and to the rough inhabitants of Newlands Farm.

"'Oh!' I said, 'Clara, how could you permit that, after behaving so ill to you? I never would have seen or spoken to them more!'

"'On the contrary, Mrs. Spooner, now that I was so happy, I began to make excuses for them. I remembered the dreadful change from Oldburn to Hume Cottage, young as I was, and I thought perhaps my uncles had, while young, been treated almost as heirs of Oldburn; they had partaken of all its luxuries and comforts, and then, just when they could least bear it, they had been thrust into the world to fight for an existence.'

“‘That may be all very well, but it should not have made them cruel and dishonourable.’

“‘When one mean passion creeps in, Arabella, others soon follow, until the hole they make is large enough for vices and crimes to enter.’

“‘Perhaps so, Mrs. Joscelyn, but, at least, I hope they got none of Uncle Ambrose’s money. I hope he disappointed them there. Clara smiles ; so it is all right.’

“Think of my astonishment when I learnt the real truth.

“Uncle Ambrose left the estate of Oldburn to his brother Edwin, and half of the money he had saved in the funds to Charles, and the other half to Clara.

“‘Gracious heavens !’ I exclaimed, ‘he was mad indeed ! Who ever permitted such iniquity?’

“‘Clara did herself—indeed, it was she who made her uncle’s will from beginning to end, and had great difficulty in making him sign it. He wished to leave everything he possessed to her.’

“‘And so he ought,’ I answered.

“‘But she argued thus, and Mr. Barton and my husband gradually saw the justice of what she said :—

“‘If you, Papa Ambrose, leave everything to me, my uncles will immediately go to law with me. They will say you were insane, and unfit to make a will, and we shall have our private history dragged to light, and exposed to all the world. Now, I would rather have nothing than that.’

“Papa Ambrose shuddered with horror at the very idea.

“‘Now, though I am more fond of Oldburn than it is possible to express, yet never before has it descended in the female line. For aught we know, there may be some old deed preventing a female inheriting ; it is not, I believe, quite certain the entail was ever broken. This might bring another law-suit, by which no one would benefit but the lawyers ; and the rightful owner of Oldburn, when they had settled whom it should be, would find him or herself in possession of the estate, but beggared for life. Now, Uncle Edwin and Uncle Charles being twins, and nobody knowing to this day which was the eldest, it does not matter which has it. But I recommend Uncle Edwin, because not only does he love the place as if it was a very paradise, but he is very clever in the management of land—and Uncle Charles knows nothing about it.’

“We all admired her wisdom as she said this, and though no one openly remarked how sadly the estate was gone to rack and ruin, everyone felt that, under the care and manage-

ment of a shrewd, active man, Oldburn would soon double its value.

"Uncle Ambrose alone made a remonstrance.

"Edwin has not married as I could wish. Mrs. Edwin is not a person I should like to see in my mother's place."

"Perhaps not, Papa Ambrose," answered Clara; "but I fancy if Aunt Patty came here as mistress, she would soon learn to think and act like a lady. That is, I mean, she would be so anxious to act the lady, she would try her best to become one."

"Do you think honestly, child, that she will ever become a person fit for Mrs. Joscelyn to visit?"

"Mrs. Joscelyn answered for herself, saying if there was nothing against her character, she should certainly visit her; for, as far as manners went, there was a certain great lady known to them both, whom all the county visited, courted—nay, worshipped, and she was as little of a lady, etc., etc."

"Well, well, that is true. If you and the squire promise to give Mrs. Edwin a helping hand, Clara shall have her way—Edwin shall have Oldburn."

"Thanks, dear Papa Ambrose; and now you must divide your money between Uncle Charles and me."

"My dear, there are great accumulations—they tell me it amounts to eighteen thousand pounds."

"Heavens! what a sum!" exclaimed Clara, remembering the happy day when she was the possessor of a whole shilling, and spent a modicum of it in buying a bit of pink ribbon to adorn her throat, blushing to acknowledge the extravagance.

"Yes, child, so you shall have ten thousand, and Charles eight."

"No, no, divide it equally—poor Uncle Charles has such a dreadful wife, he will always be poor while she lives."

"They argued, but Clara had her own way, as she deserved."

"Uncle Ambrose lived for five years after this, the happiest man in the world, he said. All his misery of former years was amply atoned for by the peace and comfort of these five years. He became a deeply religious man, which had the effect of proving to him that he had wasted his life in atoning for an act which was as purely accidental as any that the providence of God permits to happen to us."

"And how long has he been dead?" I asked.

"About three years," answered Mrs. Joscelyn.

“‘And what did his brothers say? I should like to have witnessed the scene of the reading of the will.’

“‘It was truly remarkable; the two brothers arrived to attend the funeral, and both of them announced their intention, not only to their niece, but to everyone, that they should dispute the will, whatever it might be, on the plea that their brother was insane. The lawyer, knowing the contents of the will, was so far true to his vocation, that he drew them on to make all sorts of asseverations, the remembrance of which ought to make them blush to this day. They showed no grief, and disgusted everybody. But, as Clara had foreseen, the revulsion of feeling caused by the unexpected nature of the will broke down every barrier, and my dear squire came home quite pathetic to me concerning them.’

“‘What nipping poverty they must have felt, Lizzy,’ said he, ‘for great men like them to burst out crying with joy. As for Edwin, I feel sure that in the first excitement he enacted the part of a madman much more in reality than his brother Ambrose ever did in his moodiest fits. He tore the will from the lawyer’s hands, he stared at his name written therein, as if stricken into stone. Then he shouted; he pointed with his finger to his name, he laughed, he cried, he sat trembling as if he saw a ghost! Perhaps at that moment all his wickedness rose before his mental vision; and he was beginning to feel the effects of the “heaping of red-hot coals” on the head of his guilty conscience, and Clara stood by, looking like the serene angel she was. It was her voice that first awoke him from his bewilderment.’

“‘Uncle Edwin,’ she said, ‘let me congratulate you. I know you love Oldburn!’

“‘Love it!’ he murmured, ‘I have never known happiness out of it.’

“‘Then he took her hand and kissed it reverently, as a man might kiss the foot of an angel just stepped from heaven.

“‘But he could say nothing. Words were denied him.

“‘And Charles?’

“‘Well, the squire said he did not behave quite so well as Edwin; it was only when he learnt that Clara had no more than himself, that he took heartily to his good luck. But of the whole company, I suppose no one was so purely happy as Clara.’

“‘Ah! dear Clara, there you sit opposite to me, on your cheek a tear for Uncle Ambrose’s memory. Gracious goodness! when I think how I have thought of you—when I remember that I have called you proud, ill-tempered, super-

cilious—when I recall the times I have tried to snub you, depreciate you, dislike you—oh ! dear me, how I hate myself ! You are quite a heroine—not one of those strong-minded women who go out of their way to do things that are much more proper for a man, but you are a true womanly heroine, the most beautiful of all things in this world. That is what Kate has just said. Kate asks Clara how her uncles have behaved to her since. (The wretches ! I shall never like them !) This is her reply :—

“‘They love me dearly, and think they can never do enough for me !’

“‘And how does Mrs. Edwin behave ?’

“‘She is not a bad sort of woman,’ interrupted Mrs. Joscelyn ; ‘she is warm-hearted, and if she was sure her husband was not ashamed of her, she would be less awkward and more happy. Everything goes on well when Clara visits them, because she treats her with so much respect, her husband and children, for very shame, do so likewise. Mrs. Barton is very fond of her, and says she is invaluable to her as a help in the parish. Everybody has his good points, if we would only take half the pains to find them out that we take to discover flaws.’

“‘And all the cousins ?’ asked Kate. ‘Oh ! how Clara blushes !’

“‘Oh ! ’tis no secret that all Clara’s male cousins are more or less in love with her. As for that famous red-headed Bob, to whom her first introduction took place when he was lying all tumbled and tossed on a sofa, it is said that he offers to her every time he sees her, and has threatened to shoot himself if she marries any other person.’

“‘Then, gossip,’ whispered Kate, ‘he had better get his pistols ready !’

“‘When I grow up,’ observed Bessie, gravely, ‘I shall act precisely like Clara.’


“‘Ah, Bessie !’ answered her mother, ‘where are your uncles Ambrose, Charles, and Edwin ? Be content that you have a fond father and mother, and that you will certainly be happy all your days, please God.’”



CHAPTER VIII.

PUFF ! PUFF !

Extract from the Gentlemen's Journal.

“ AM no scribe, for I make Elizabeth answer all my letters ; but they tell me I am bound to record my opinion of our present life.

“Well, I don't dislike it, or rather it would be very pleasant indeed, but for one or two things. In the first place, we were wrong not to bring with us a good cook. Scrutiles may be very valuable in his way, though what that is we have not yet discovered ; but as for cooking, faugh ! the less said of that the better ! I am of opinion a roasted potatoe, or even a boiled egg, is not safe in his hands. Another thing against us is the smallness of the island. We are, by contract of renting, not permitted to kill more than a certain number of rabbits. Keeping to so many daily, we can knock them over in five minutes. For the rest of our sport we have the sea-fowl and a few land-birds. The former are not eatable, and I almost consider it murder to kill that for which one has no use.

“The fishing is not bad, but we have only one boat, and she is rather small. Altogether our time hangs a bit heavy on hand. I miss my farm, and thinning the woods and laying out the walks ; which, by-the-bye, reminds me I could improve this place wonderfully with a few labourers. I'll sound Spooner and Frank ; perhaps if I take a spade in hand, they will help. I should think the convict knows how to dig and break stones a bit. I make no doubt of it that he understands that sort of thing a vast deal better than cooking, and yet I can't help liking—no, hang it ! pitying the poor beast ! He is so awfully anxious to please ! I mean to have his history out of him some day.

"Another mistake we have made is, only to have the boat from Rampton once a week. Every other day would have brought us newspapers, and fresh milk and butter. I have taken to sherry and water as the best substitute for tea. Now, that's a thing I miss. I like a good cup of tea, and nobody makes it to my mind but —"

"Hullo! Squire, why, are you writing a novel? That's the fourth page you have turned over."

"I write rather a large hand, Spooner; but I don't want to take more than my share. You just stopped me in the nick of time."

"I should think I had," writes Mr. Spooner, 'evidently a name was about to be written that has no license to be recorded in the Puff Journal. And yet why not? Are the holiest feelings of our nature, the dearest thoughts of our hearts, the most beloved names, to be arbitrarily dismissed from our thoughts, our tongues, our pens, by the fiat of a mortal will? Surely not. I also could name a name, but why do so? Will the doing so soothe the present hour? Will it bring the object nearer? Will it satisfy the longings of a too fervid imagination? No—then let the name be.

"Let me bring down my thoughts from their elevated flight among the regions of happiest fancy, and cast them upon this island on which we are located. Are we happy? Yes. I look around me, and see all the materials for happiness within our grasp. Here, we live free from all cares, all trials, all heart-burnings. Our lives pass in the calmest repose. Each does just what he likes best; and for those whose minds are tuned to literary fancies, this pause in the busy work of the world is delicious. I dip into my favourite poets, and exclaim with them:—

"Sooth, 'tis a pleasant life to lead,
With nothing in the world to do
But just to blow a shepherd's reed,
The silent seasons through;
To muse within some minstrel's book,
Or watch the haunted air;
To slumber in some quiet nook,
Or idle anywhere."

I cannot conceive any reasonable mortal feeling dull, or finding time hang heavy on hand, if he has his favourite authors to commune with:—

“ ‘Give me leave
To enjoy myself; that place that does contain
My books, the best companions, is to me
A glorious court—where hourly I converse
With the old sages and philosophers.’ ”

“ ‘Spooner, you are not fair—you are copying sentiments out of a book.’ ”

“ ‘By no means, my dear Crabshawe, I was merely looking to see if my quotation was correctly written.’ ”

“ ‘And what right have you to quote? Can’t you say fair and straight you never were happier?’ ”

“ ‘I beg your pardon. It would be an injustice to one I will not name if I averred that this was the most felicitous portion of my life. On the contrary, it is due to her—to—I mean that person—to state that, though I am happy, remarkably happy, yet still there is one lunar circle of my life —’ ”

“ ‘In which you were particularly moonstruck.’ ”

“ ‘I can very well understand, Crabshawe, that you are totally incapable of comprehending the finer feelings of our nature—so we will not argue the point. But, if I am to write in the journal, I must not be interrupted.’ ”

“ ‘Very good—I am mum.’ ”

Spooner took up his pen, and filled it carefully with ink. He then laid it as carefully down, and ran his fingers through his hair. Suddenly he snatched up his pen, and for a moment look inspired, but the beautiful idea fled, apparently for ever. He put his pen on the top of his ear, as was his custom at the bank. He thrust both hands into his pockets, as if diving for gold; they came out again with nothing. He took his pen again from his ear, and nibbled the end—then he again carefully filled it with ink, and held it poised for use. Finally, he pulled his left whisker out and consulted it. Apparently it had no advice to give. He removed his pen to his other hand and consulted the other whisker.

During this scene, the book of the journal was quietly abstracted, and the above conversation and scene recorded. It was put back just in time for him to record the following sentiments:—

“ ‘What an exquisite pleasure there is in an independent life! We want food; with the self-reliance, with the indomitable pluck of the ancient Briton, we shoulder our arms and go forth to procure it. In doing so, we feast our eyes on the beauties of nature. In her sweet countenance (un-

heeded amid the vortex of the world's pleasures) we find stores of treasures that delight us with their novelty.

"There are the every-varying hues of heaven, painting its pictures on the mirrored sea. Again, ocean is moved to her innermost cavern, she heaves with great sobs, she lashes the shore with passion, she rolls and roars with mighty and resistless power. The fleet she bears upon her bosom—our nation's pride, our glorious navy—stagger from stem to stern. Like wayward corks upon the water, they toss about as if she were playing with them. Mighty ocean, the most unchangeable of God's works! what treasures dost thou not hold within thy water-palaces? At times they are thrown up on thy twice-laved shore, teaching us the vanity of all earthly things.

"Such are some of the feelings engendered by our present life. They take one out of one's self. In the world there is no opportunity to experience this calm, this pause in one's career. No thrilling emotion tingles through my veins; I am stirred by no inward throb. The anticipation of the next moment occasions no agitation. Life is a gentle burden; like the froth on ocean's wave, I am tossed about careless and light.

" 'What is life worth without a heart to feel
The great and lovely, and the poetry
And sacredness of things?'

"'Tis a happy existence, reminding me of the sportive life of my boyhood. Nevertheless, the godlike nature of conscience makes itself felt. It reminds me of a certain Tuesday in the wild but match-making month of February. On that Tuesday I pronounced vows. I solemnly undertook the charge of a gentle fragile being, whose name I will not mention. But conscience asks, am I performing those vows? It appears not. Then is this calm deceitful—this delicious life a snare? Nevertheless, there is an end proposed in it, a purpose for the benefit of the nameless one—for that end I live.

"I am surprised that we received no message by the old herring man. But why surprised? A philosophic mind ought not to allow itself to be surprised.

"And yet I have had to express great astonishment at the various and complicated mysteries of cooking. Even a simple potato declines to be mashed here as it does at home. Can it be the climate or the water? To be sure, as George

said, there was rather a taste of snuff in those we had yesterday. We questioned Scruttles closely, but he swore solemnly 'never no snuff came anigh his noddle,' and as is the duty of one man towards another, unless you have excellent reasons to the contrary, I believed him.

"Perhaps Sam—but no, I will not hurt the feelings of his master, but I wish to state publicly that I object to snuff as a seasoning for mashed potatoes, or, indeed, for any kind of food.

"To-day, being partial to puddings, I assisted Frank to cook the dinner. We concocted a pudding between us. While we were mixing the ingredients (I am sorry to say, not only did no one ask a second time for some of our pudding, but both the squire and Sir George only took one mouthful), Frank made a very sensible remark—

"‘Society is like this pudding, Spooner—it ought to be composed of different ingredients, and well mixed.’

"‘I object,’ remarked Crabshawe, ‘to one ingredient, and that is woman.’

"‘The foundation of my pudding should be woman, and woman only,’ answered Frank, boldly.

"‘Why, Summers, I thought I was curing you of that nonsense.’

"‘You cannot cure a man of a disease that he loves better than his health.’

"‘Pooh! pooh! you only say that to vex me.’

"Perhaps he did. At any rate, if he really loves, he is remarkably cheerful under the circumstances. He is the right hand of us all. Good Frank! if he really thinks as he says, I must give him some of my experience.

"Granting that the mixing of one's pudding is typical of the mingling of society, I must say that, to make woman the foundation of it, would be to spoil the pudding—we should have too much of one thing. But mixed in proper proportions (by-the-bye, no wonder our pudding was a little heavy: Scruttles has just shown us the whites of the eggs which were to have been whipped and thrown in)—they are absolutely necessary to the formation of society; in fact, society without the admission of women would be as tasteless as—as —"

"Your pudden."

It is supposed that Mr. Spooner was called away, leaving his sentence unfinished, or that he failed to find a proper simile, for the conclusion was in another writing.

The style of Captain Crabshawe's writing was on a par

with his spelling. His remarks seem to have been prepared with a view to compose a paragraph in a "Reading made easy."

"Fine day," he continues—"sport good, smoke when we like—that is the thing! It is rong to say men carnt live without wimmen. All I can say is, and I no I am rite in what I say, it is THEY bring the trubble. If anny one wants to be happy, let him come to Puff. He shall have a harty welcome. There are a set of good fellows there that wood not change with anny one. It rekuires no more words to tell of our content. We have but one want, and that is a handy fellow to help Scruttles. I make no remarks, but that's my pinion. I think it the manly thing to do to state the truth.

(Signed)

"A. C."

"Great bore keeping this journal, but I suppose I must take my turn at it. In fact, our whole life is only composed of turns. What with taking my turn to do without Sam, and then to have a turn to do with that beast Scruttles, going on with having to do everything for myself, except when I am doing something for everybody else, with the turn of having nothing done for me by anybody, by Jove! I am twisted out of my own individuality.

"I believe Adam was right—that is, if he had a choice in selecting his companion. There is something deuced good-natured in the female composition. They don't mind giving you up a nice book, even if they are in the third volume. (The squire had locked up the third volume of 'Exquisite Sins' for three days; he says he loses his place now that his wife is not by to keep it for him.)

"It is the dowagers I dislike. They are always making up to one to induce one to make up to their daughters. It disgusts a fellow with the whole sex. I wish all the dowagers were in paradise. No, that won't do, for I want to go there myself. I wonder who thought of sending the herring man here to-day. It's odd they did not say, at least, that they were well. How do they pass their time, I should like to know? Here, if we could not take refuge in sleep, the time would be deuced heavy. I am not fond of poetry, like Spooner, or your philosophical, metaphysical ponderosities, like Frank, and I have nearly finished all the novels.

"The squire has just declared he does not sleep well at night. 'Good Heavens! then, my dear Squire, why do you take the trouble to snore?'

"I wish I knew what to say next. I cannot fill up my part of the journal with quotations of poetry. By-the-bye, we enjoy one thing in perfection, and that is smoking. Truly we puff to our heart's content. There is also another comfort—one can say just whatever comes into one's head without the fear of anyone taking hold of your words, and bringing you to book for them.

"One thing is, we shall not stay here long. If we find our lives monotonous, the ladies must be in the depth of dulness. I look to see the flag up any day; so, I suppose, does Frank, as he is constantly going out to spy it.

"The bay looked very pretty to-day, when one of the Trinity yachts came in, and steamed about looking for her anchorage. It is something like life to see her. I wonder who is in command? It is a great mistake our not ordering a boat to come and take us to church. Our fishing-boat is too small, even if we could row it in our go-to-meeting clothes. And as for sitting within twenty yards of that convict, I would not do it to save my life. I am not at all surprised at Sam's dislike to the fellow. A respectable servant, such as Sam is, ought to have a respectable fellow-servant to associate with. I shall remonstrate seriously with the squire. There is one person here whom it is useless to consult.

"G. F."

"I hope that is not me. I acknowledge that I am a brute, and have felt a brute ever since I came to Puff. I perceive this book—this journal—has a command written on its first page. I recognise the handwriting of our king. It therefore behoves us to obey the order, which is to write 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.' I hope my companions have sincerely fulfilled the command. I fully intend to do so. I will begin by proving not only that I am a brute, but all my companions are brutes.

"God made us men. He endowed us with reason. He gifted us with strength. He permitted us a natural love of power, and encouraged us with the indisputable possession of spirit and gallantry. We were to use all these gifts in the service and for the pleasure of those who, resembling beings of another world, are of so refined, so intellectual a nature, they were formed on purpose for us to serve and worship.

Perhaps there is some pleasure in one man showing another he can ride, fish, shoot, hunt better than the other; perhaps

there is a secret delight in proving oneself wiser than the wisest. Perhaps there is a glow in our hearts at the thought, 'We are so strong!—we can knock a man, just like ourselves, down!' All this I will allow. But how about the love of power, the courage to do and dare, the desire to be knightly and courteous? We cannot all rule, and none obey; we don't want to do other men's barking when he has got a dog of his own. We have no wish to run headlong into dangers and disagreeables for only a man. Our natural pluck will make us punch our enemies ourselves.

"Therefore we have had gifts given us for an especial purpose. Failing that service, we have no use for them. We become merely the animal—the brute. At present our sole pursuit is that of shedding blood. Our greatest pleasure is to gourmandise, and our most innocent amusement is to smoke away the little sense we have left.

"Let me place before you the picture of one day here at this delectable island of Puff.

"We rise in the morning without an object, until one presents itself to us, in the shape of procuring something to eat, or cooking it. We neither dress like gentlemen, or act as such. One would suppose, by the snarling and snapping that goes on, we intended to imitate the manners of a pack of hounds.

"We have a most wretched breakfast, served in a most deplorable manner, in which our least discomfort is the want of something we can eat. There is no fresh rosebud of a face opposite to whom you can offer muffins in the hope of receiving a smile as thanks; no lovely and beneficent being by your side who wants the salt, or who wishes to add to her sweetness by a spoonful of honey; no beautiful and kind hostess pouring out your tea, making it a positive pleasure to drink it from her hand.

"I am of Crabshawe's mind, 'tis better to go to the cupboard and eat when one is hungry, than to sit down to any meal where the table is not beautified and refined by the presence of those divine beings. I respect Crab's feelings, and will not write down in his Puffs' journal a name he does not wish to see.

"But let him picture to himself how we breakfast now. Each snatches at that which is nearest to him, and should it by a happy chance be less nauseous than usual, he takes good care not to divulge the fact. But he cuts and eats, and smiles to himself.

"'Ha! ha!' thinks he; 'to-day I shall not starve.'

"As for tea, happily that is given up. Partly because we have no cream or milk, and partly because the only man that can make it declines to do what is the prettiest, sweetest, dearest act of—a divine creature. It is her province, her right. Her dainty fingers can play among the dainty china; but for a man, simply he deserves to have his head broken for even making the attempt.

"After breakfast, we wrangle as to what we shall do; certainly we amuse ourselves wrangling, we are always at it, no matter how trifling the matter.

"Some decide to shoot, one intends to fish, a third fancies a book, and, under pretence of reading, sleeps the dull hours away.

"But we meet at that farce called dinner. We wrangle over that, though goodness knows for what. It is not worth it, and is only so much better than breakfast, that it is so much later in the day.

"We certainly have novelties at our dinner, that we can never hope to see elsewhere.

"Nearly everything is seasoned with snuff. Scruttles denies, with such painful earnestness, even knowing what snuff could be intended for, that we make-believe to believe him. Sam, plunging into the hazardous experiment of making rolls for dinner, forgot to wash his hands after arranging his master's hair. The rolls looked good, but impregnated with the odour of macassar oil, it is needless to say, we permitted Sam to eat them all. In a sort of despair and fear of famine, the squire said—

"Scruttles only requires to be put in the way of things; my dear Frank, do you think you could give him a lesson or two?"

"I signified my sense of the honour conferred on me of being tutor to the 'ex-convict,' and modestly proposed to make some coffee at once, which was a success. Without vanity, I may claim the high position of being the best cook on the island. Certainly that is not saying much, for, as the truth is to be told, I don't think there is anybody else that knows a bit about it.

"Nevertheless, I pride myself most on the fact that, when cooking, I wear an apron!

"In the evening we wrangle over whist, to which we diligently devote ourselves for four or five hours, amusing ourselves between whiles with railing at Sam or kicking Scruttles.

"Privately, we are each devoured by curiosity to know

what the 'divine creatures' are thinking, doing, and saying; and more than one of us heartily pray in secret that their patience would give way, and that they would send us a message of compromise. But they won't. You need not hope, you may cease to pray. If they become mummies through dulness, they will never give in. My mother used to tell me that Job was the model of all patience. I will back any 'divine creature' against him, when her plumage is ruffled.

"Come, here is some amusement—the squire has sent for Scruttles to relate his history. Pen in hand, I will note down the interesting particulars.

"By the dumbfounded appearance of the 'excellent convict,' I think the squire has astonished him more than ever he was astonished before. It is evident that Scruttles has not that opinion of his past life that makes him think it worth the relating.

Judging by the additional twist of ugliness into which he has screwed his most forbidding countenance, the less said about his antecedents the better.

"If it was possible to make a bolt of it, Scruttles would bolt; but being on an island, as much imprisoned as in the strongest jail, he must face his position. But there are mitigating circumstances. The squire gives him a good steaming glass of gin-toddy to refresh his memory now and then, and he is allowed to sit down, and also twirl what he uses for a hat.

"Conscious of these favourable points, Scruttles clears his throat; evidently he has settled it with his conscience that he will draw largely on his imagination.

"If Muster Squire will have his story, why, he must just take what he can get.'

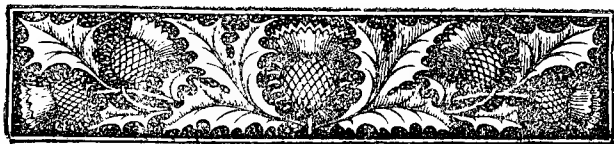
"The squire has rather a sneaking kindness for Scruttles, founded, he himself says, upon the extraordinary amount of ugliness he could bring to bear on his countenance.

"It is quite an art, Sir,' remarked the squire, speaking to no one in particular; 'every time I look at him, his ugliness strikes me with new wonder.'

"And now imagine us grouped round the amiable 'convict.' The squire in the largest chair, a noble cigar in his mouth, his legs wide apart, his countenance beaming with intense interest. Our King Crab just behind him, with a clay pipe, sucking in volumes of smoke, and ejecting them energetically; he is pleased at the prominent position of his 'convict.'

“George is rather in the background ; he meditates a snooze, I fancy. Spooner is deeply interested. Some philosophical question in the matter of Scruttles is about to be solved : he leans forward full of interest. His cigar is in his mouth, but he has forgotten to light it. Sam hovers in the distance ; Sam looks as if he could put his thumb to his nose.”





CHAPTER IX.

THE HISTORY OF SCRUTTLES—RELATED BY THE “EXCELLENT CONVICT” HIMSELF.

66 **D**ON'T remember me nothing about being born, please yer honour. I were a horphan, and I mostly lived hunder a pair of stairs wi' Jem. Jem were my brother, leastway he said so, and I've heard tell as most on us is brothers if we only knowed it.

“Jem were older nor me, and in coorse he knowed the rights of the case better nor I could. But in the matter of larruping me, cribbing my wittles, and a-cussing and a-swear-ing at me, and a-knocking of me down, and leaving me to pick myself hup, Jem was surely an out-and-out brother to me. There worn't no mistake about that, any how.

“I was amost eight years old, when Jem says to me I were growed too big to live with him, and considering as he couldn't stand upright unless he wor a-sitting, and that I could not lie down on my bed because of his cheer, why, I do suppose as he had a bit of reason. It wor an uncommon small place to be sure. There wor the taty bag, right in underneath, and then there wor his bed, and then the bit of old sack for his dorg, and arter that a chist like, in which he kept his wictuel and all his valuables; and then came I, and hover me the cheer. And when me and the cheer was there, why, then we was uncommon safe to be sure, 'cos why, you couldn't open the door.

“‘Well, Jem,’ I says, ‘if so be as you says,’ I says, ‘that I must go,’ I says, ‘why, I do suppose,’ I says, ‘that go I must,’ I says.

“‘Ay,’ says Jem, ‘go ye must, and the sooner the better.’

“‘Well, Jem,’ says I, ‘go I will,’ says I, ‘but will you tell me,’ says I, ‘where I be to go,’ says I.

“‘Oh ! bother,’ Jem says—says he, ‘what’s that’s to me, you take yerself hoff, or I’ll wollop you in a brace of shakes !’

“With that I went, gentlemen ; because you see, I had allers found Jem true to his word. With that I went, gentlemen ——”

Here Scruttles paused, looking round with a hideous leer for compassion ; taking a gulp of his gin-toddy to assist.

The squire, staring at him in admiration of this new phase of ugliness, gave him his sympathy at once :

“Poor fellow !—and where did you go ?”

“Well Sir, yer honour ; I were a dootiful lad, so I went back to my mother.”

“Your mother ! I thought you said you were an orphan ?”

“She were my stepmother, and an uncommon wick ——”

“But who was your father ?”

“My father, Sir ! I never had one—leastways, I never heard of him.”

“Then how could you have a stepmother ?”

“I begs your parding, Sir, humbly ; she were my mother-in-law.”

“Pooh ! pooh ! married at eight years old !”

“Don’t bother him, Squire, he means foster-mother. I had a foster-mother, and I believe she is alive to this day, and a horrid old troublesome hag she is,” interrupted King Crab.

“Well, Scruttles, whether it was your own mother in the form of a ghost, or your stepmother, or your mother-in-law, or your foster-mother, go on, in the name of goodness !”

“I will, please your honour. About this time I were in a little trouble, and I mostly think as that wor the reason why Jem thought I was growed, and so my ——” he paused.

“Say mother at once—we shall understand.”

“So my mother she were mad wi’ Jem for sending me home like, and she said if I staid another minute in that there place, as she ’ood break every bone in my body—which in coorse, gentlemen, was not to be thought on by me ; so I says, ‘Mother,’ says I, ‘keep yerself to yerself,’ I says, ‘and you’ll please yerself,’ I says ; and with that I went, gentlemen.”

A long pause. Scruttles hoped to be encouraged by more sympathy, or was concocting fresh matter from the rich treasures of his imagination. His auditors were beginning to feel that the story of the excellent convict was deficient in two things—interest and truth. But a good refresher of gin-toddy started him again.

"With that, gentlemen, I went ; and I'll not deny as I was uncommon low, and I were a-thinking as perhaps the best thing as I cud do, was to seek for my old Dad."

"You said you had no father," exclaimed the squire impatiently.

"No, Sir, he worn't a father at all. We called him Dad, cos why, he tuk a lot of us boys in, and we worked for him. Dad were a man with a hawful temper, and when he wor angry, there worn't no mistake about it, ye see. When Dad saw me, he hup with his toe and kicked me right into the gutter.

"'You cum here, ye blessed jail-bird,' says he ; 'cut yer lucky out of my sight,' and a deal more. With that I went, gentlemen."

"Yours is a very odd story, Scruttles. What had you done, a child of eight years old, to make them all so cruel ?"

"It wor the bit of trubble I were in, yer honour."

"But you never told us about your trouble. How could a boy like you have any trouble ?"

"Well, you see, Sir, this wor how it were. I were a-walking one arternoon down St. Giles' way, and I seed a kercher alying on the pavement, adoin' nuffin at all. So I picks him hup ; and 'aving a cold in my hed, I wipes my nose on him, and just as I did so a pleeceman lugs 'old of my 'air, and says, 'Cum wi me.' Now Jem had tould me horful things of those there places as pleecemen takes boys tew, and I were skeered. So I makes a dart between pleeceman's legs—he wor that orkard as he toppled over into the gutter, and I wor out of sight when he picked hissself hup. But he knowed me the next time as hever he sawed me—and they were so uncommon kind, those pleecemen, that I mostly think as there were a score of 'em allus luiking out for me. So, gentlemen, with that I went."

"To jail ?"

Scruttles nodded.

"And they talk of justice in England," exclaimed the squire, bitterly. "A poor unfortunate eight years old boy to be sent to jail for picking up a handkerchief ! Upon my soul, it's enough to put a man in a passion !"

"Justice probably had her spectacles on, and saw the other end of the handkerchief in a pocket," remarked Frank.

"No, Sir, I axes yer parding ; it were not an old lady in spectacles, it were ——"

A pause.

"Go on, Scruttles," said King Crab ; "get to something

lively. Miss all your boy tricks, and begin again, when you were a man ; he will have some famous adventures in the bush, I daresay."

"Ay, Sir, them wor days !"

"But I should like to know how you got there," observed the squire.

"Well, Sir, yer honour, I went by sea."

"Pooh—I mean why you went there."

"Well, Sir, yer honour, the devil a bit I know the reason. I had been in a bit of trubble."

"Another trouble ?"

"Oh ! laws, yes, yer honour ; I were allays in a bit of trubble. I was no sooner out of won, than, as ill-luck would 'ave it, I cotched another."

"Always about handkerchiefs, Scruttles ?"

"No, yer 'onour ; I wor one of those poor critters born wi' a 'art, yer 'onour. I wor in love, and my dispositions being 'onerubble, I says to Jude—Judith wor her rale name, but Jude was her love name like—I says to Jude, 'Now, I means 'onerable by yer,' I says, 'Jude, and so we'll be wed,' I says, 'but as I harn't the 'onour of a quaintance,' I says, 'wi' a parson,' I says, 'why, Jude, yer must go yerself and settle it,' I says. Wi' that, gintlemen, Jude, she bust hout a larfing. 'Why,' says she, 'I don't no,' says she, 'noffin of a parson neither,' says she. So ye see, gintlemen, we wor in a fix, Jude and me. And I had got the wituals for the weddin' feast, and me and my pals had a paction atween for a good lot o' licker."

"Well," says I, 'we'll be wed anyhow, Jude, for I mean ye 'onerable. Let's 'ave old Dad as parson,' I says. And she wor willin'. But old Dad, he said as he couldn't wed we without a ring, he says, gintleman, so Jude and me tuk on drefful. Then says old Dad, 'I 'ave a ring—give me two bob, and I'll loan it yer.' Wi' that, gintlemen, bein' 'onerable I beat him down to one bob, and old Dad set to work to wed we ; and the ring, it wor a butiful ring, rale gould, wi' shinin' stones fixed in it, and I wor a-thinkin' arter we wor wed as Jude shouldn't give it back to old Dad, it wor so unkimmen genteel like. Well, we wor a-bein' wed, and the butiful ring it wor in my 'and, when I wor tuk so unkimmon bad wi' a stitch or cholera, that I had to bolt hout hinto the hair, gintlemen, and, has ill-luck wood 'ave it, I ran rite hinto the very body of a beak. 'Ho,' says he, 'hi 'ave been a-lookin' for you, my brick, cum along wi' me.' Wi' that I went, gintlemen."

"How so? Did not you tell him you were just about to be married—though it would have been no marriage. Scruttles."

"So I do suppose, yer honor, but then my eddication 'ad never been hattended to, yer honor, and I nowed no better. My-wishes wor to be 'onerable."

"And why did the beak want you?"

"Well, Sir, it wor all along o' my father."

"Good heavens! why, you said you never had a father."

"Laws, Sir, we is bound to 'ave a father, wether he be a father or no. Mine worn't by no manner of means a father to me, and never wor, and that's why I were a horphan. He worn't no credit to me as a father, and so I cut him. He guv me one day a ole ankercher of gran cloes, and it were as if Muster Poole, that were the tailor's name on these here cloes, had a measured me. So in coorse I 'ad 'em on to be wed. And wood yer think it, gintlemen, my father 'ad a-stole those clothes. He were a wery active chap, and had follered a cab, and 'ad cut off a portmanty, and he 'ad the hunfeeling 'art as to giv me the cloes, and I were a-wearing thim, and the beaks they were arter him, and he 'ad the owdacious willainy to tell them there beaks as I tuk the portmanty hoff the cab, and I were then a-wearing of the cloes, which I were, gentlemen, I'll not deny. And so he tells 'em where I be, and the hend of it were, that—with that I went, gentlemen."

"To prison?"

Scruttles nodded.

Then he groaned.

"Such a hunfeeling villain of a father!"

Then he took such a gulp of gin-toddy, all that remained of it disappeared.

But there was a long pause; either Scruttles waited for sympathy, or orders, or more gin-toddy.

The squire is one of that sort of men who like "a spade to be called a spade." To create an interest in his mind everything must be so plainly put before him, so palpably straightforward and clear, so devoid of immediate, ulterior, or mysterious bearings, that it must be out of the power of anyone to doubt the least atom of the statement made.

And here was a story in act of narration—a story, the hearing of which he had been anticipating with extreme relish, that, at the very beginning, presented to him a medley of relationship that was in itself totally incom-

prehensible. Whether Scruttles was an orphan, or had a father and mother, mother-in-law, step-mother, foster-mother, a dad, a brother, a wife, or apology for a wife, could not, at this present showing, be stated for fact.

But that he was in trouble, and always in trouble—which trouble, however mysteriously imposed upon Scruttles, seemed in every case to germinate from seed of his own sowing—there could be no doubt. The oft-recurring crisis of “with that I went, gentlemen,” pronounced with as much pathos as so gruff a voice could assume, and accompanied by as pleading a look as so frightful a countenance could achieve, came at every crisis with happy effect.

Whether he always went to prison on these occasions, or merely obeyed humbly a stringent — painfully stringent order, to quit the presence of the speaker, is beginning to act quite as a nightmare on the squire.

Utterly distasteful as this much-desired story now seems to him, he is morbidly anxious to follow up the course of those “with that I went, gentlemen.” He will forgive the whole conglomeration of relationship, merely to discover the crowning upshot of this test. He is anxious to give the man a fair hearing, though he begins to have qualms that he is compelling the uncouth creature to damn himself out of his own mouth. With regard to the virtue of truth in his story, the squire perceives already that this indispensable ingredient has nothing to do with any part of it but “with that I went, gentlemen.”

And as for interest or pleasure in the hearing of such recitals, our good squire’s fine old heart revolts from the very detail thereof. But, like the sick man who has to take nauseous physic because of his own excess, the squire gulps down his discomfiture, and at last says,

“And how long did you stay there?”

“Well, yer honour, it were a weary time. Folks were a-beginning then to bussy theysels about the prisons, and we was a’most tortured wi’ parsons, and buiks, and sermons, and tracts, and folks as is called Filanderers.”

“Philanthropists,” suggested Spooner.

“Maybe, Sir, but I didn’t consort with anny of they folks. It were about bad enuf to be there, annyhow; and then to be impoged upon, and worrited, and never let alone—it wor as aggrawating as noffin. And I ’umbly ’opes as parliament will see us righted. We does our turn at the treadmill, and we picks our lot of oakum, and we jams away at the stones, and we is stopped in our baccy, and I wud like for to know,

yer honour, if a hiron steam-hingin of a 'orse could do more? It's that as I wants to know."

"But how long did you stay there?"

"Well, Sir, yer honour, I were not nigh so long as Jem—my unkle—you know, yer honour, as turned me out from hunder the stairs ——"

"You said he was your brother," said Summers as the squire cast a hopeless glance at him.

"Well, Sir, it were never rightly known as to which he were, but in the matter of being the ondutifullest relation as ever were, Jem wud have ben ekally remarkable hether way. He were that sort on a chap were Jem, as niver tuk his own heyes hoff a-considerin' of hisself. As a brother, he were of no more manner o' use to me, yer honour, than a lady's pocky-handkercher, and as a nevey, he were a deal sight worse, were Jem. And if ye'll b'leave me, gentlemen, he married Jude, her as I guv my heart to."

Here Scruttles attempted a whimper, and seeing him looking anxiously at his empty glass, Summers silently filled it again for him.

He took a good gulp, cleared his throat, and went on. It was apparent that Scruttles was warming to his work. Evidently he had hit upon a vein in his imagination of wonderful richness, or the gin-toddy emboldened him to stray off into unknown realms of fancy.

"Yes, Sir, yer honour, Jem, he married Jude—my sweet-heart. We was all there, in trouble, together."

"What! Jude, and Dad, and Jem?"

"Ay, Sir, and father and mother, and my eldest sister Sal, and her babby—all along o' that their fine goold ring. In coorse, when I had went where I went, this fine goolden ring were in my hand, and in coorse they as tuk me where I went, says they, 'And where didst thou crib that?' So in coorse I tould 'em, and they sends, they do, and nabs 'em all, and I were a-most knocked down in my feelins when I sees 'em all a-walkin hin. And they was tuk uncommon strong, tew, in their feelins; and they says, says they to me, but I'm a-most afeard as sich language ain't fit for sich pleasant company, and under favour, yer honour, I wunnot say a word on it. Blud is thicker nor water, and they was all kin to me. So I jist harkaned to their nise, and then, gentlemen, with that ——"

The squire's finger was ready to note down the familiar phrase. It doubled itself up again under the thumb as Scruttles continued.

"I sot down. And arter that Jem—my brother as were—he got fourteen year, and Jude, she got seven year—that were how it were as they got married—leastways so they said they was—cos as 'ow they thought as they 'ood go together; but Jude, she went a-longer in the same ship as me, and I says to Jude, I says, 'Make it hup, lass,' and Jude, her seemed pleasant, and her did say on her mug as her were willing."

"What do you mean, Scruttles?"

"Well, Sir, folks as ain't a 'art in their bussums, they is the chaps as hinterferes with a feller's feelins. It were, yer honour, a horder in kouncil (a deal of trubble that there kouncil tuk to be considerable onpleasant), that there were to be no kummucations atwixt any of we as went; and so, as the mother of invention is a mighty kurous critter, we wos hused to scrat on the pewter mugs wot hideas came into our 'eds; and Jude, not 'aving larnt the hart of writing, her heddication 'aving been as little tuk notish of as yer humble servant, why, she got another gurl as culd do it to rite for her. Well, we were about landing, and I were a-thinking as may-be I might get into the bush along wi' Jude, when that there gurl as wrote on her mug, says to me, says she, 'Jude means to go along wi Dad;' and I were considerable riled, and, being so tender-'arted, all my blud were up, and it seemed to keep a-'ammering in my 'ed, and a-running just for all the world the wrong way, and that made me seem so as I culd see noffin. As I were a-walking on the deck, and Dad he were a-walking tew, and I never seed un, but, being tuk unkimmon bad wi' gripes or cholerae, I runs bolt up again Dad, and he topples over the side, and I'm a-most feared as poor Dad wuld have drowned, but, in coorse, as luck wuld 'ave it, he were chained to another man; and that there chap were a mighty strong fellow, and 'aving no mind to drown wi' Dad, why, he thought it most the best thing as he culd do were to pull hard and 'oller for his life. With that, gentlemen, I went."

"Down into the hold, I hope, heavily ironed, the best and fittest place for you."

"I 'umbly axes yer parding, Sir; I went into 'ospital. I were tuk wi' the cholerae in my brain, I were so tender-'arted. I were in 'ospital until we landed, and arter that I were tuk up kuntry by a man as 'ad occasion for a strong yuseful chap as sheppard, yer honor. He axed me as wos I fond of mutton; and I says, says I, 'Wery'; and wi' that, Sir, I went up kuntry."

"Now, Sir, if my master 'ad onny said to me, 'Is I fond of sheep?' why, then I culd ha known what to say. But when a man goes fur to call a beast by one name, when all the wile he means some'at quite contrary, why, I puts it to yer, gentlemen, if a bran-new set of brains culd ha made it yout?"

"Me and my master were unkimmon full of each other as we was a-going hup kuntry; and if it wor the last words as I suld ever 'ave ocassion to say, I will make no denial of the truth, but he were very 'andsome in his treatment. I were a-thinking has at last my trubble was hended, and my wartues was rewarded, and it were not so bad a kuntry, arter all. It wor a chokery kuntry for dust, and my master, he were quite convinced o' that there fact; so, we were allais a-washen the dust down, which, axing yer parding, gentlemen, his the onny way I knows on in regard to dust. Dust it his, yer honour ——"

"Never mind the dust—go on; you and your master did not continue such good friends, I conclude!"

"As fur the matter o' that, Sir, yer honour, I bears he no malis; I were a heasy-going chap, and I says to him, I says, 'Don't yer holler at me, I 'ave 'ad the choleraye in my 'ed,' I says, 'and it a-most makes me mad,' I says. Because ye see, yer honour, he were a-'ollering at me, all day long, on akounts of these there sheep. He said as he wanted a shepard, and no sich a brute (them was his individual words, Sir) as a London jail-bud, who 'ad never set heyes on a sheep in all his born days, which were a hobserwation, gentlemen, that in regard of the truth of it, was about the biggest lie as I ever heard tell on, as, in coorse, I 'ad seen 'em 'anging up in the butchers' shops by dozens. But he were a man of a low dispogition, he 'adn't no feelins, he 'adn't; and this were 'ow I knowed it, Sir, yer honour. I were a-seeking one day for these here blessed sheep of hisn, which, for getting of theyselves into bushes, and kuntries, and mountains, where they hadn't no call to go, and for rampaging and skurrying, and straggling, and bolting just where they'd no occassion, air the most oudacious, aggrawaterynt, cantankerous set of heythens as mortal man were ever bothered with; and I were amost beside myself with heat and wexation, when I comes to a purty sort of a house like, and I taps at the door, just to ax for a drop of summat, being spent wi' toil and aggrawation. And the master of that purty place, he comes hout, and he takes hon hawful, along of theye oudacious cantankerous sheep, as 'ad been in

'is patch o' corn. And I axes 'is parding, and were civil and genteel like ; and with that he gits the better of hisself, and he axes me hin ; and then he turns on the Parliament dredful for sending hout into this fine kuntry such a hawful set of blackguards as knows nothing at all but murder, and thieving, and stealing, and lying ; and he says—'My man,' says he, 'you look strong and active,' says he, 'why don't you,' says he, 'turn over a new leaf,' says he, 'and become honest?' says he.

"'I ax yer pardon, Sir,' says I, 'I ain't myself, Sir,' says I, 'I belong to the British Parliament, Sir,' says I.

"'That won't perwent yer being honest,' says he, 'if you had been the man I want ye to be, ye would have been watchful, and not let my friend yure master's sheep get into my corn-land. He is a good neighbour of mine, and would cut his right hand off before he would injure a friend, or do 'er wrong, but cursed as we are by Government servants, it's pitiful work. Come, my man, do yer duty, and I'll stand a friend to you.'

"Now, I'll not deny, as there wor a somethin' as guv me a dig in my ribs. He were a fine man were that ; he were so heartsome.

"If you please, gentlemen, 'umbly axing your parding, I will drink his 'ealth. I think, gentlemen, if I culd see that there face of his agin, I think, yer honour, as it 'ood do me good ; but yer see, gentlemen, it were not to be as we suld be friendly, and it came about all along of Sal, she that were my cousin ——"

"You said sister !"

"If so be as I said sister, sister it may be, but sich is my rekollections of Sal that she were my cousin, and it isn't much time as I 'ave 'ad to make out my relations properly. But Sal, being servant to this here good harty gentleman, why, in coorse, being neighbours, I tuk to courting Sal ; and so I calkerlate in the long and short of it, as Sal could be no great relations, except in the matter of we being wed. But has for knowing whether sal were my cousin, or my sister, or my grandmother, I 'ave been mostly in the 'abits of calling her my wife. Becase as luck 'ood 'ave it, this here master of hern, he were all for making fellers 'appy. He 'ad his feelins, he 'ad. Axing your parding, gentlemen, I'll make so bold as drink his 'ealth. No man could desire a better master, and I most think as I should never no more 'ave 'ad a bit of trouble if I bided with him. For in coorse, when he found as Sal and me was wed ——"

"How could you marry without leave of Government—both convicts?"

"That is 'ow it were, Sir; when Sal brings me the bit victual and drink, as him did order, I screeched out at sight o' she, and she 'ollered like hanything; and I says, says I, upon his axing the reason, 'She be my wife!'

"Sal were the girl as wrote that there on Jude's mug, and I knowed Sal were fond of me; and with that she tumbles into my harms, and takes the hint pretty kind.

"'Well,' says her master, 'I am not one to part man and wife, so I'll speak up for ye at the Coort, and if your master will give ye up, I'll take ye on wi' me.'

"I axes yer parding, gentlemen, but if you please, I'll drink his 'ealth."

"By-the-bye, Scruttles, what was your Christian name?"

"I never hed none, yer honour."

"But what did people call you?"

"They just called me onny names they had a mind to; I made no dejections."

"What did Jude call you?"

"Hall the hawfullest names as ever you heerd on! I a'most thought on times as she wood break her teeth wi' hard names, and I am constant in my persuasious as she wore 'em out wi' talking. Oh! Jude had a tongue!"

"Who gave you the name of Scruttles?"

"I don't rightly know, Sir, unless it were my noble capting there."

"Me, Scruttles? No such thing. I always supposed you had the same name as your mother—she, you know, who called on me to tell me you had got home, and wanted employment."

"Now, upon my word," interrupted the squire, "if Scruttles has really a mother, I shall be glad to see her."

"Well, you may see her any day at Rampton; she lives just out of the town, and keeps a little shop. She is an old friend of mine, and so I thought to do her a good turn, and help her son to some employment. The old man goes out to weed."

"Scruttles' father!" some of them exclaimed.

"Of course! I conclude he is your father, Scruttles?"

"Well, my noble capting, I wudn't like fur to say he were, of myself—leastways, I 'ood wish yer honour to back me hup —"

"Come, come, this is getting beyond the ridiculous. Go back to your new master—how long did you live with him?"

"Axing yer parding, Sir, I never lived wi' him a day, more's the sorra. It were in this manner as it came about: I were a-waiting at my master's for leave to go from his station to Sal's master, and a-thinking of Sal, and all that there, and I wor a-sayin as I must 'ave it out wi' Sal about that there babby as she 'ad left behind her in the ould country, and I thought to tell Sal, as my fatherly feelins was unkommon small, and I didn't have any hideas of bein' a dutiful parient, especial to an unbeknowed hinfant, and there came a messenger like mad a-sayin' as Sal's master's place were set on by the natyves, and he wanted elp. So my master, he harms 'isself and his men, and hi takes a 'atchet, and hoff we goes to help, and hi were in a mortal way about Sal, a-thinking as some black hederous critter of an Indyman would ha' tuk her hoff fur her beauty—for she were a butiful critter, wi' hair as bright and as red as a live coal, and such a strapper, whereas Jude —"

"Go on—get to Sal's master."

"Well, Sir, it worn't no manner o' use getting there. The purty house wor burnt, and there were no signs of onny-one. Wi' that my master were tuk hawful bad, and he says, says he to his men, "'Tis no natyves, 'tis bush-rangers. A free pardon to all who follow me and rescue them!' Laws, Sirs, ye might ha' knocked me down wi' a feather. A free parding! hooray! says I to myself—a free parding I'll get, no matter how! And, gentlemen, with that I went."

"Not to jail, Scruttles?"

"No, yer honour, but I knowed war they were, and I tuk my master straight there, and we reskied 'em, and got 'em safe back; and that is 'ow, axing your parding, Sir, as I cummed home."

"That is, you knew the hiding-place of the bushrangers, and you betrayed them?"

"Axing yer honour's parding, I did not belay 'em. We shot 'em. As for Jem, I guv 'im a taste of my 'atchet, and old Dad he were shot, but it were not me as put a hend to his career, because in coorse I couldn't, not 'aving a musket or pistol for to shoot with, and being my step-grandfather-in-law."

"What?"

"My foster-grandfather, I axes yer parding. I wuldn't a-done it on no akounts; but Jude she up wi' a hax, and she had the hunfeelin' art as to hit me over the nose the haw-

fullest blow, as I fell a-weltering hin my blood. And when they was hall manakled and murdered, Sal's master picks hup my nose, and claps him hon agin ; and that is how it were, gentlemen, that this here nose of mine ain't all here. For the matter of that, I never rightly knowed whether it were mine or Jem's—but onny how, Jem being dead."

"I am glad he is dead," murmured the squire.

"Jem being dead, he hadn't no call for a nose anny more ; but I am thinking it were Jem's nose, for it were such a hawful hugely wun. But Sal's master he did it hall for the best."

"What was his name ?"

"Axing your parding, Sir, I never made so bold as to make the hinqury. He were a gentleman ; and if Parliament wunts a man for a husband to one of the royal princesses, he oughter be that man, for he were all day long a-thinking of heverybuddy, and never tuk 'is heyes off his wife and babby."

"Was she taken too by the bushrangers ?"

"Ay, yer honour, if you please."

I suppose Scruttles was again about to drink the health of his friend, but as his glass was now empty, he could do no more than peer significantly into it. No one taking the hint, he proceeded :

"If you please, yer honour, he were a fine man, and she were a butiful critter, and the babby were a butiful babby, and there were a deal of crying and blubberings all along of joy, yer honour, that they had rekivered theysels from they murderous bushers ; for Jem he were a desperate feller, and he said as 'ow he'd 'ave thousands of pounds for theyre ransom. But, in coorse, Jem could not kep his wurd to hissself in the matter—cos why, he were dead, and we reskied them. And there were a deal of joy far and near, for this here fine-'arted gentleman were thowt greatly on, and so was his butiful lady, and the butiful babby."

"Well, go on ; I suppose you were well rewarded ?"

"That I were, yer honer. I were a hyro, like the Dook of Wellington, and becos as that guv a deal of henvying and mallis, and sich hawful sins to all they folks has his hunder the protection of Parliament, why, it were thought as I had best go back to the old kuntry. Sal's master, he said as he had promised me a free parding, but the Parliament were so unkimmon koind has to say they 'ood still be my pertecter, but, in consekenz of all this henvy and mallis, they sed as 'ow my precious life warn't safe. Jude, 'ung hall hover wi'

chains, swore she 'ud 'ave my life, if she swung for it. With that I went, gentlemen."

"Home to England, with a free pardon?"

"Axing yer parding they was too fond of me to let me free hoff. I were guv a ticket."

Here they all exchanged glances, indicative of very mixed feelings. King Crabshawe was evidently much discomposed, George was horrified, Spooner's hair began visibly to rise, the squire alone, pleased to find his earliest opinion of Scruttles so remarkably verified, smiled complacently.

"And did your Sal come with you?"

"Sal were a remarkable gurl, she were hall hover tender-'artedness. She were that tender-'arted as she were quite foolish, and she culd not leave that butiful babby. She were its nuss, and when it were reskied and got home, Sal took the strikes shocking bad. She 'ollered and shrieked like anything. So, finding her dispozitions contrariwise to me, her true lovyer, fur she said as hur 'ood see me dom—I mean, yer honour, as her would on no akounts fulfil her hengagement to me, being 'onerable hunder hall circumstances—why, gentlemen, with that I went."

"And left Sal behind?"

"In the matter of that there fact, hit his not hin the natur of my disposition to pertend has she cummed away wi' me. 'No,' says she to me, 'I'll drown myself afore I 'ood ever tetch heven a finger of such a carchish as yourn.' Which were a thing of Sal, gentlemen, has I didn't hexpect on no akounts; and I do suppose has hit came about all along of that there hystrikes as guv her the cholera in her brain. But her master, that fine-'arted man, and her mistress, that theyre butiful critter, and the butiful babby, they was fond of Sal, theye were, and they sed on akounts of her being the won as bamboozled me hinto showing that there secret place, they 'ood be father and mother to she. And I reckon as Sal is made for life. To be shure, 'ow her did tongue-rag me! She 'ad the owdaciousness to tell me as I 'ad a soul as 'ud be lost. Then I says to Sal, says I, 'a soul hindeed!' says I, 'and where be that soul?' I says, 'show hit me,' I says, 'and hi'll thank ye,' I says. You see, gentlemen, Sal 'ad got among the methody, and she were a-praying and a-crying hall day hover her sins, were Sal; and so, gentlemen, that were 'ow it came about as me and Sal did not get wed."

"And how came Sal's master not to be able to get you a free pardon, after his promise?"

"Well, Sir, that there cirkumstance is mighty kurous, and I make bould to think, yer honour, as Parliament hinterfered. Leastways, when I cummed home, I kep myself to myself, and came down to these yer parts. Sal's master, he guv me a bit of munny for to send oure babby out to Sal, fur he were an unkommon fine-'arted chap, were Sal's master ; but they're a kurous set o' folks, them folks as settle parish matters, and I were aferd, gentlemen, has they 'ood nab me for the keep o' that there babby, and so I hanna been a-nigh the place. And that makes me low, axing yer parding, gentlemen, fur I thinks o' Sal a-crying for that there babby, which, in the matter of being a babby, his, I do suppose, summat nigh on to ten years hold. So with that, gentlemen, I didn't went."

"Then all I have got to say is, that that is about the only place you ought to have gone to. Let me know where this child is, and I will take care and see that it is sent out to its poor mother."

"I thank ye from my 'art, yer honour, and I 'ood obleege ye down to the wery ground, but I don't rightly know noffin about this here child—leastwise, goin' on nigh upon two year ; for Sal's master, he wrote to these here parish folk his-self, which were a straightforward 'onerable coorse to take, and they hanswered him right off, ekally straightforward hand 'onerable, and they sent that there child of ourn hout to Sal, now this three year cum Michaelmas."

"Now take yerself off—I have heard enough of your story at present."

"I 'umbly axes yer honour's parding.—I 'ave a deal more in my 'ed, unkommon curious and ——"

But Scruttles was summarily expelled, and the whist table was prepared.

The squire is, however, in no mood for whist. It is positive pain to the dear old fellow to be brought face to face with such a specimen of low vice and utter worthlessness as Scruttles.

King Crab, not having so delicate a sense of the moral laws of our being, begins to make excuses for his "excellent convict."

"Poor beast !" he says, "what he must have gone through ! He seems to have been an idiot, or a fool, or something of that sort, to be drawn into all these scrapes."

"There did not seem much drawing—I think evil was inherent in his nature," observes Spooner.

"I can't think that—his grandfather and grandmother
——"

* For God's sake don't give him any more relations !” growled the squire.

“ I mean those respectable old people who keep the shop—those that I mentioned to you living in our lane.”

“ You said they were his father and mother.”

“ I don't think they are—she might be his sister ——”

“ Don't, Crabshawe. Why, you are as bad as the convict himself !”

“ What do you mean, Sir ?” exclaimed the captain, rising like Mount Etna, flaming with wrath, and smoking vehemently.

“ Nothing ! he means nothing !” Summers pleaded. “ Come, sit down to your whist. Don't you see the squire is bothered ?”

“ He has no right to say I am like a convict.”

“ He did not say so ; he merely meant that in the matter of knowing how many relations Scruttles had, or whether he had none at all, or if one stood in the place of all, or all acted the part of each, as occasion required, you seemed quite as much in the dark as himself.”

“ And so I ought to be. Why am I supposed to know or care a fig for the fellow's relations ?”

“ You volunteered the information ——”

“ It is beyond my comprehension,” soliloquised the squire, utterly regardless of what was said, “ how he came to be what he was.”

“ Hah !” says Spooner, smitten with the metaphysical aspect of the squire's remark. “ I am precisely of your opinion, Squire. The man is a remarkable specimen of the power of matter over mind.”

“ I don't think the fellow has a mind. Suppose him capable of thinking, his thoughts ought to have driven him mad. Does anyone know if anybody ever was born without a soul —I mean without a conscience, you know ?”

The squire's important question remained unanswered. None of them were sufficiently up in psychological studies to be able to state for a fact that they knew of such a case.

Scruttles was the only specimen with a bias that way, and he, being the wherefore, of course could not be the example also.

“ I observed that you were taking notes, Frank, of all he said. Read it over, please.”

He complied, and had no sooner finished, than one and all burst out laughing. Even the squire roared.

"Why, the thing is too ludicrous. Don't you perceive he never mentions a name?"

"That shows he has a mind, at all events; for he reasons that his antecedents do not permit of close investigation. He does not intend that any of us shall be able at any time to bring him to book for what he has this night related to us."

"Probably he heard your pen going, Frank, though he did not see you. I feel sure he has mystified everything purposely!"

"But still," said the squire gloomily, "what an awful history it is, supposing even that the most of it is false. The man's nature is thoroughly demoralised."

"He was born, Squire, I should say, with the intellectual bumps wholly deficient, the moral development extremely imperfect, so that ——" remarked Spooner.

"I don't believe in bumps."

"Perhaps not, my dear Sir; then take his physiognomy. According to Lavater, a man should be possessed of breadth between the eyes."

"Which Scruttles has not. No baboon, no ape, no gorilla, ever had a pair of eyes more nearly placed together."

"Scientifically speaking ——"

"Why scientifically? Why not take the man as we have found him—a low, base, cringing nature."

"Come and play whist, my dear Squire, and don't bother your brains more about the man."

The squire obeyed, but anon he revoked. Instead of apologising to his partner, the squire solemnly looked across the table and addressed him thus:

"Suppose, Sir, that you or I had been born in the same station of life as Scruttles."

"I don't suppose it at all; pray go on, Sir, we have lost the game."

The squire revoked a second time, and a second time he leant across the table and said,

"Suppose, now, that we had done the things that Scruttles has done."

"I cannot suppose it, Sir, 'tis impossible; I am not capable of such baseness. We have again lost the game."

For the third time the squire revoked, his partner threw down his cards, and attempted to rise.

"Don't go," said the squire, "I want to ask you a question. What have we done that the Almighty has been so merciful as not to make us like Scruttles?"

"I cannot answer your question, Squire—as we none of us can, I fear ; but I will do my best, while on the island, to give Scruttles some notion of the difference between good and evil," answered Frank, the only one who seemed capable of replying to such a remark.

"Do, Frank, and I will help you. Much as I loathe the fellow, I long for him to taste, for once in his life, that feeling which God has often vouchsafed me, the glow of doing a good action. I think it might open the man's faculties."

"He has some sense of it, for his involuntary admiration of Sal's master proves he felt the difference between good and bad."





CHAPTER X.

“LUFF IT IS.”

Extracts from the Ladies' Journal.

BY CLARA.

ESTERDAY a boat came from Exe (by order) to take us to church. They seem a primitive set of people, for the boat was here by nine o'clock, and as there could be no infringement of the famous agreement, of course we could not suffer the sailors to land. We therefore made a virtue of necessity, which, after all, was an agreeable necessity, giving us so many more hours of freedom (yes, I will so call it), and set off for Exe about twenty minutes past nine o'clock. We left our palace in perfect order, but wholly unguarded, except by Runa and Mignon. Of course Susan came with us—arrayed in her bonnet of gorgeous bows.

“How is it that old-fashioned servants, appearing as perfect pictures of their kind in their working dress, yet have no sort of taste as to their Sunday garments?”

“In the first place, Susan must have spent the time she usually occupies in scouring her pans, on this particular Sunday, in polishing her face. It shone like her own particular little copper kettle. Surrounding this shining visage was a large shady bonnet; on the left hand rim of which, perched like a tottering bird, was a misshapen bow of ribbon—scarlet in colour. Diagonally placed across the bonnet from this bow was another, and from the second, also in a diagonal line, was a third. The position of this bow was as critical as that on the rim of the bonnet. It was perched at the edge of the crown. A broad piece of ribbon was so arranged, that it had nothing to do with any of the bows, but

seemed placed where it was as if to hide a rent. In fact, it had all the appearance of a patch, though it was solely arranged thus for ornament.

"Susan's bonnet was very much too large for her, and consequently she had to give little jerks every now and then to keep it in its place. We were in fear for those two tottering bows every time she did so.

"Her shawl was meant to have a white ground, but it was so barred across in every direction with bright colours, in which twice as much yellow was used as any other, that at a distance it presented one gorgeous spectacle of the brightest hues. It was securely fastened across the chest by a large cooking pin.

"Her dress she was pleased to term a lustre. It was shiny, stiff, uncompromising, and the colour a dingy attempt at purple shot with yellow. White cotton gloves, and her prayer-book folded in her pocket-handkerchief, completed her attire—all but a huge cotton umbrella, to the handle of which was tied a pair of pattens.

"The two sailors, no doubt struck by so much finery, were very attentive to Susan; she receiving their civilities with great dignity. She so far paid her due, as she called it, to the Sabbath, by always putting on her company manners with her best clothes. On week days she has but scant courtesy for the male sex.

"‘Them men folks,’ she observed to my gossip and me one day, ‘aggerwates me, young ladies. They amost think as the warld were made a purpis for them; and if it were, the Almighty sune find out as they couldn’t do nothing for theysels, they were bound to have a woman to do for them.’

"‘Were you ever married, Susan?’ asked my gossip.

"‘Hoot! Miss; do you think I wad make myself a maid-of-all-wark for the likes of them. The mistress, now, it’s a pleasure to do for, for if ever a lady knowed the differ between a good servant and a slattern, she be it. Oh! she is knowledgeable!’

"‘Then, Susan, had you ever a lover?’

"‘Be done! Miss; a lover indeed! a likely thing in my kitchen! Let me catch him a-coming here, and I’ll give him my notions of sauce.’

"And Susan, snatching up nothing at all that we could see, dashed out of the kitchen, very red in the face.

"‘She must have had a lover, gossip,’ said I, ‘and been jilted.’

"‘You know more about such things than I,’ answered this

impertinent little gossip of mine, 'so I will take your word for it.'

" 'We will ask Mrs. Joscelyn.'

" 'She is too loyal to tell.'

" 'But if it is to Susan's credit?'

" 'Ah ! that is a different affair.'

" But now we must go to church. We were in the boat, as I said, twenty minutes past nine. So short is the distance between us and Exe, that as we walked up the steep path to church, the clock in its primitive steeple was striking ten.

" 'A whole hour to wait ! What shall we do with ourselves ?' This is what we said to each other.

" On reaching the churchyard, we were astonished not only at its size, but at the number and peculiarity of its tombstones. By degrees, as we went reading the names on them, we were struck with painful astonishment at the almost universal record on each. Nearly all who lay there had been drowned.

" Involuntarily we turned our eyes on the beautiful calm 'monster' that lay placidly basking under the brilliant rays of a June sun.

" On her bosom she was bearing with a dignified pride not only our island and the other islands, but the powerful two-funnelled Trinity yacht, the fishing smacks, and even the little tiny boat that brought us to church. As we looked down now on to the beach, it lay like a stray leaf on the water.

" Oh ! sea—so grand in quiet beauty, so lovely in majestic repose, so loveable in gentle power—why art thou so remorseless ? Why rage and swell ? Why drown the people who have confided in your goodness and strength ? What ails thee, oh ! thou sea, that thou drivest to and fro ?—that thou lashest thy sister's shore ?—that thou destroyest the children she has trusted to thy care ?—that thou fillest the churchyards round thy boundaries with the bodies of those thou hast drowned ? An answer comes surging up from thy deepest caverns—' Look into the heart of man. What seest thou there ? Evil and passion continually.'

" If the creatures with living souls rage and terrify their fellow-mortals with the violence of their stormy moods, wherefore ask of that which hath no reason, which knoweth not good from bad, which obeyeth the laws of nature, which listens to the whispers of the wind, and rises and falls as the west or the south wind blows, which hath never altered since God made it, beheld it, and said, 'It is good' ? Wherefore

ask of it the reason that men are drowned, and the churchyards filled with the bodies cast up from the caverns of the deep? It is true. It were more reasonable to ask the drowned wherefore they carried on their business on great waters.

"Nevertheless, we walked among the grave-stones with sad and chastened hearts. There was so much of pitiful, loving human woe expressed in the records. Mrs. Spooner shed tears over a tomb that painted, as touchingly as stone and graven words could, the distracting grief of a young husband who had borne his wife on one arm, while he battled among the waves with the other, only to find, when both gained the shore at last, that she was dead, past all recovery.

"My dear little gossip mourned over a tomb-stone thus inscribed:—

'SACRED TO THE MEMORY

OF

HUGH SCUDAMORE,

Aged thirteen years,

Midshipman on board H.M.S. "Chanticleer,"

Drowned the 25th November, 1824.

"He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."

"As for me, I contemplated, with feelings that had much of pride and admiration mingled with my sorrow, a large monument, the work of one of our most distinguished sculptors. Underneath a stone canopy that was upheld by round pillars of polished granite, lay, as if on a wreck-strewn shore, the marble figure of a young girl. In the soft pliancy of the form, in the helpless, hapless attitude, you saw at once before you the representation of a drowned figure. The youthful round face was upturned, as if she had appealed to heaven with her last breath, and the immobility of death had immortalised the look. There was no despair in the face, no pain, no agony—there was simply devotion. Her long hair fell like a pall all over her; one hand clasped a book to her breast, the other was placed down on her dress, grasping it in folds, as if to keep it in its place. One little foot was encased in a stocking, the other seemed like a thing of life—so fair, so round, so perfect, with a bit of sea-weed wound over the instep.

"Before I read the inscription on her tomb, I knew she was one immortalised on earth as well as in heaven :—

'SACRED TO THE MEMORY

OF

FRANCES CALDER,

Who was drowned on the night of the 15th of Oct., 18—

A night memorable all over England

for

A tempest of unusual and appalling violence.

This Monument

Is raised to her memory

By the survivors of the Troop-Ship "Adrian Capel,"

Who owe their lives to her pious fortitude

And heroic patience.'

"The ship being driven by the furiousness of the wind on to the reef of rocks known by the name of 'Wolves Reef,' the captain announced that all hope of saving her was over, and urged the people to commend themselves to the mercy of God, as their lives were now in His hands only. Disregarding his advice, with frightful yells, the crew, the troops, and many of the passengers rushed to the spirit-room. They were met on their way, clothed all in white, in such garments as she could snatch, by Miss Calder. She stood before the door, and warned them back. Her look was so lofty and inspired, her youth and beauty so great, her courage so high, that all to a man obeyed her.

"With clear ringing voice she told the captain that she knew the coast well, and, if any strong man would venture with a rope round his waist to cross a surging sea between them and the next rock, he could so arrange a rope, that all might, with common courage, reach it also, from whence to the shore there was a safe causeway along the reef of rocks. A sailor, corroborating her words, volunteered to take the rope. He succeeded in crossing, and so fastened the rope, that five or six people passed safely in as many minutes. Two more ropes were now got in order, and the women and children were all safely landed.

"During this time, lashed by her own request to the mast, this beautiful and inspired girl read out the prayers for those

in danger. In the midst of the fury of the tempest, the war of the sea, the rending and crashing of the vessel, her clear voice was heard like a warning from heaven ; it never wavered or stopped, until now, the women and children safe, she was urged to go next.

"No," she answered, 'let the fathers and sons go !' And they crossed, comforted and encouraged by the holy words that fell from her lips. It seemed as if the elements submitted in some degree to the power of her words. There remained but eight people on deck, when the captain cut the lashings that bound her to the mast, and prepared to take her over himself.

"It seemed as if the lull in the storm ceased with the sound of her voice and the spell of the beautiful prayers ; for just as she was stepping from the shelter by the mast, to trust herself, tied to the rope, into the boiling surge, a terrific blast swept over every crested wave, carrying sheets of water in its course, and fastening upon the vessel, sent it heaving over, breaking all the ropes, and drowning, by the violence of its power, every soul left, but one. That one, Adam Wright by name, said he heard the sweet soul, in the midst of the boiling surge, commending herself to God.

"She was found the next morning in the position in which she has been sculptured.

"A saint on earth, God took her to be a saint in heaven, in the seventeenth year of her age.

"One hundred and forty people were saved, seven drowned. I have written this from memory.

"It is shorter, and more touching, graven round her tombstone.

"How small to me appeared the trivial vexations of everyday life compared with the hour of mortal fear and agony endured by this fair young child of seventeen !

"I was deeply thinking on her fate, when little Bessie touched me, and said, 'Look !'

"The bells were ringing—all too soon, we each thought—and it seemed as if the sound of them had awakened life in the great two-funnelled Trinity ship.

"We joined an old sailor who was looking at her through the telescope.

" 'They tell me, Madums,' said he, 'as there be a famous admiral aboard, and I were a-looking to see if he were a-coming to sarvis. Mostly, Madums, when a man be famous, he be a righteous sort on a man. If he be him as I heered tell on, it's bound we be to give un a cheer.'

"When we heard his name we agreed with the old sailor that he ought to be cheered. Our hearts quite beat with the anticipation of seeing so noted an admiral.

"There for sartin be a barge coming, but there's nobbit two plain folks in it, and one be steering. A hadmiral have a power of gould on him, and a cocked hat, and a gran' sword, haven't he, Mum?" asked the old sailor of Mrs. Joscelyn.

"I think he has when on duty, but I do not know if he would come to church in his uniform."

"There be a cutter, and a launch, and a jolly-boat, all as full as full cun be. And there be hossifers, and leftenants, and middies in heach. But nowhere does I see my Lord Igh Hadmiral."

"Oh! do see him, Mr. Sailor," says little gossip, "I do so long to see a hero!"

"He has a Victoria Cross, I believe," said Mrs. Joscelyn.

"Has he, indeed? Goodness gracious me! How I long to see him!"

"I think we had better go into the church and take our places, for the sailors are landing," said Mrs. Joscelyn.

"Much to my gossip's disappointment, in we went.

"Her mind was too much occupied to notice the singularity of the church. It had a low roof, which outspanned into two broad aisles, not alike in length or width. These were supported by stone pillars of the most primitive workmanship, arranged without order, and seemingly placed more from some fancied weakness in the roof than from architectural rules. The effect was, nevertheless, beautiful, for each pillar had its groined ribs, and, in every part of the church, the grouping of these rough huge pillars and their powerful arches had a wonderful effect. One could imagine the church had been built by the united aid of its own congregation, who, lacking skill, had brought strength and will to the work, and poured forth the powers of both towards building a house of God that should last for ages.

"I can imagine the pyramids of Egypt scarcely less imperishable than the rude grandeur of this ancient church.

"The pews were by no means uniform. It appeared as if each member of the congregation had constructed his own seat after his own liking. This irregularity added to, rather than took away from, the solemnity of the building. It looked indeed a house of prayer—so simply holy, so purely sacred.

"We were shown into a long wide pew, which, with a fore-

thought that might well be copied in other churches, was rudely emblazoned with the words—

'The Strangers' Pew.'

"It had some pretence at ornament. Here and there a piece of primeval carving peeped out, and the door had an ancient and ornamented hasp. There were one or two small cushions placed at intervals on the seats, and a few ponderous, straw-covered hassocks stood out pretentiously for use. It was certainly the best pew in the church. All the others were filling fast. Old weather-beaten men, accompanied, or leading by the hand little rosy-cheeked, smiling children, Elderly grave women, invariably dressed in dark blue coats, black velvet bonnets, and their faces surrounded by snowy caps. Pretty girls came tripping in, making a sort of bob-curtsey as they passed the 'strangers' pew,' followed by slouching, heavy-footed youths, who stroked down their hair, and trudged up the church aisles, as if the more noise they made the better.

"And now we were conscious of the tramp of many feet.

"My dear little gossip, not even looking up, flushed crimson to her very temples.

"It was a beautiful sight to see the fine tars trooping in, such a grand body of men, doffing their hats as they crossed the threshold, and treading so lightly within the church, they altogether made less noise than one of the clumsy youths alone. By-and-by the church seemed full of blue jackets. Every pew had an open door for them, and in a while our door was unhasped by the clerk, and two officers in naval uniform shared the 'strangers' pew' with us.

"I knew enough to be aware that neither of these could be that famous admiral. But my gossip was looking through her eyelashes all over wonder.

"Suddenly, noiselessly, two gentlemen entered the church-door and proceeded up the aisle. Plainly dressed, unpretentious, with grave looks, with a notable reverence they passed through the people. Even as they entered, our naval officers had risen from their seats, and already opened the door; and they seemed to bow their heads in a sort of respect as these two simple, quiet, unassuming gentlemen entered.

"Could either of these be the expected admiral? One was too young. And the other? A small man, wearing spectacles, an oval face, sunburnt, no—weather-beaten by

the storms of forty winters and more ; for above, by the roots of his hair, his skin shone as white as a girl's.

"How full of devotion is his manner ! How reverently and earnestly he pronounces the responses ! His little old prayer-book is almost as weather-beaten as himself ; and each time that he has to listen and not use it, each time it goes into his pocket.

"Perhaps that little prayer-book always lives there ? Perhaps he and it are such old friends they are never parted ? Perhaps they have been in peril together ? He looks as if he was glad to thank God. He is happy in spirit ; he has no care, he is without trouble, his face is expressive of perfect serenity, heart and mind ; all this is doubly expressed in his countenance as he thanks God.

"There does not seem to be anything famous about him ; yet somehow I feel sure he is that famous admiral. His companion is a very fine fellow. Though only dressed in a suit of plain grey tweed, he is a king to those two smartly dressed naval officers.

"He has large, gracious, and benign eyes. They glance about gently and calmly. They have rested for a moment on my poor little gossip, who, though never looking up, is conscious of the gaze, and blushes more violently than ever. Compassionately he withholds the lordly glance, and she pales as quickly as she flushed.

"I catch a look ; he half smiles, as I encounter it unflinching. In truth, I wonder at the beauty of his eyes, their clearness, their benignity, their truth. I think to myself—'So looked Frances Calder, when alive.'

"But hold ! am I not ashamed to think so much of these strangers, so little of my prayers ? We are about to sing a hymn. The clerk has presented 'the strangers' pew,' not often so full, with some more hymn-books. He who I think is the great admiral hands one to Mrs. Joscelyn, saying almost aloud—

" 'I don't sing—I listen,' and refuses to use a book.

"He who I think is a hero, or will be one, for he is still young, turns to my little gossip, and seems to command her, by some mysterious unspoken power, to sing out of the same book as he does. And all the time he sings, he looks down upon the tiny little thumb opposite to his own, down upon those wonderful eyelashes of hers, as if expecting them to rise and show the eyes beneath. But they never rise. They shade invariably a cheek that becomes red and pale with astonishing rapidity. In the middle of the hymn, it strikes

me, still irreverent, that I have never even looked into the faces of the two officers ; I don't seem to care to look at them.

"Now I will attend to my prayers.

"I do so with some little trouble. I catch myself listening to him whom I think to be the famous admiral, saying his prayers. He repeats them with all his heart. He shuts his little weather-beaten prayer-book, gives it a squeeze, says— 'We beseech Thee to hear us, Good Lord,' out of his very soul ; opens it again, and goes on properly. That prayer, 'We beseech Thee to hear us, Good Lord,' was for the Queen. Again the little prayer-book is shut, again has a little squeeze ; again I hear the words out of the very depths of his soul. This time it is for those in peril, in danger, and tribulation. When we come to the thanksgiving, the little prayer-book goes to its home in his pocket ; he wants both his hands to clasp together, as we do when we are little children. This (for I know he is) famous admiral clasps his hands together, and repeats the thanksgiving prayer with the pure faith and fervour of an innocent child. Thus I think he hath been 'in peril oft,' and God hath delivered him.

"Now we have another hymn, and he with the great calm eyes has again ordered my gossip, without word or sign, to sing out of the same book with him. And she is nervously anxious to obey. They are both ready long before anyone else !

"And now he that must be the admiral, for the first time looks round.

"He looks at my gossip—he takes off his spectacles, wipes them, puts them on again, and looks once more. Then he looks up at his friend, who is a good deal the tallest. A sort of pleasant flicker of a smile comes on to his face as he perceives that his friend is intently gazing at my gossip, who, somewhat more calm and used to her peculiar situation, is singing most piously and heartily. Indeed, so much so, that she has for a moment forgotten the great lordly creature holding half her hymn-book, and looks up.

"Their eyes meet for the first time. Those large, unwavering, gracious eyes look down into a pair of orbs that have the startled but trustful look of the fawn's. He sees them only for a moment, as the eyelashes are required once more to shade the blushing cheek.

"Somehow my gossip stops singing ; she lets her neighbour hold the book by himself—she fusses in her pocket for

her handkerchief. She thinks the hymn is finished, and sits down, but she has to rise again, abashed and trembling. These old sailors like to hear their cracked droning voices, and they quaver through every verse, in evident delight at their own performance, always giving the last verse twice over, that we may be certain not to be defrauded of our due share of 'praise.'

"The coming of the sermon surprises me—I have been so inattentive. Nothing and no one shall disturb me more. I will remember I am at church. I will not care for famous admirals, for their handsome friends, for my little gossip's girlish prettinesses.

"So, in two minutes, I see the admiral again looking at her; he and his friend exchange a glance which tells me as plain as words they are both admiring her. She looks very pretty—her fresh rosy lips just a little opened, she is listening so attentively to the sermon, and the long eyelashes are again shading the cheek. She is quite a little rose-bud of a girl, and the sun seems to think he will look at her also, for he has sent a ray of light just across her sunny hair and brow. Now I will listen to the sermon. So I do for five minutes. Then I am astonished—perhaps a little shocked—to see he whom I think the famous admiral nodding. Certainly his eyes are closed—he is dozing.

"Taking advantage of this state of things, the young lieutenant, in his fine uniform, draws himself up, looks manly, and gazes upon the sleeping admiral with bold and indulgent eyes. The sleeping admiral nods a little too much, and wakes up with the effort—the lieutenant sinks back into his corner, and shrinks into as small a space as he can.

"But I will attend to the sermon.

"It begins to occur to me that the sermon is a bad one—not worth listening to. Moreover, the delivery of it is unpleasant—all the s's are pronounced as z's—the preacher is saying now, speaking of another than himself, 'The manner is not to be regarded if the matter be good.'

"I agree not with you, oh! preacher; there is that in thy manner which offendeth me, and there is nothing in the matter that interesteth me. Let me be excused attending to thee, and let me read a lesson in the human heart, that seems opening to my vision. I would analyse the nature of which God makes our heroes. I would define the springs from which noble thoughts come; I would trace to their source the emanations of high-mindedness, of self-abnegation, of —"

"Now, to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost."

"Shame ! shame to me ! Even the end of the sermon has surprised me. What vows have I paid the Lord in His house? What offerings of the heart have I laid on His altar? From beginning to end 'I have done that which I ought not to have done, and left undone what I ought to have done.'

"Let me go to the monument of the devoted and heroic Frances Calder, and take a lesson from the beautiful upturned face—from the wave-washed form, graceful and lovely even in the stony grasp of death."

The beautiful characters of this writing ceased here, and an impulsive sort of school-girl's pen takes its place. Many of the words are scored under, but latterly the writing becomes more firm, the mind is evidently much too full to remember the scoring.

"Last night how we grumbled at that great cannibal of a steamer coming and making so great a commotion. Mrs. Spooner thought it would bump against our island and knock it over. Fortunately, as Clara explained to her, under the sea our islands are all one, the mountainous parts rising up and making islands of themselves. Captain Crabshawe, it is to be hoped, will not hear this. It would grieve him to think he was still on the same continent as a petticoat, though the sea is so good as to separate us.

"When the sailors came at nine o'clock to take us to Exe church, they told us that this 'cannibal,' as I called it, was one of the powerful screw vessels that go about the coast of England, visiting the lighthouses and taking them stores.

"It had come into the bay to see after the lighthouse at Ribble, which was in need of repair, and would probably stay two or three days. So we must look upon her as a friend, not a cannibal.

"For my part, now that we were going to leave our island for the first time since we came here, I felt a little sad. I know I am very often a naughty little thing, and this time I ought to be very much ashamed, for we were going to church.

"But we had been so peaceful and happy all the week, and I did not like any change, I thought. I had read of the weary pilgrim suddenly finding an oasis in the desert, where he bathed his blistered feet in a cool fountain, and, sitting under a shady fig-tree, had a mossy bank for a pillow, and without moving gathered as many figs as he could eat.

"Now, though I am not a weary pilgrim, and, indeed, never feel weary at all, yet it is very pleasant to be in this quiet, still place, leading such happy, calm lives—it is as if we had come to an oasis in our journey of life.

"But I must not record any more of my silly little thoughts, for I have so much to tell—oh! so much! Only, it ought to be known that I was thinking very seriously this morning, just as a person would on an eventful day, for such has this been to us.

"When we got into the churchyard, how sad it was to read the tombstones! Almost everybody had been drowned. I did not feel so much for the poor drowned people as for those who put up the tombstones, for there were such doleful records of their grief. I cried a great deal, and could not help thinking how it came to pass that so many people should have lost all they loved best, and what they loved most. And here was I, a little insignificant thing, who did not even know what sorrow was. How good God had been to me! I would say my prayers very fervently in this church, surrounded by the graves of all the drowned, for what had I done to be so much more blessed than they?

"While I was thus thinking, an old fisherman came most respectfully up, and said, 'There was a famous admiral on board the screw yacht, and that we should see him, for he was coming to church.'

"Oh! how glad I was! I had never seen anything or anybody famous in my life. My heart beat. Clara once sat near a colonel who had been honourably mentioned in the despatches from the Crimea. I suppose he despatched a good many Russians, though Clara could not see, and did not like to ask, if he had been wounded himself.

"Clara has seen a great deal more of the world than I have; for once she passed a soldier, only a common soldier, with the Victoria Cross on. She says she never felt so proud in her life, and if she did, so calm and wise, what should I have done? Indeed, I don't know; perhaps—but, no—Mrs. Joscelyn says that a true lady always acts like a lady, no matter under what circumstances. I hope, if I ever meet a man with the Victoria Cross, I shall be a true lady, however my feelings may overcome me.

"Clara agrees with me that there is something about a sailor that makes every Englishwoman's heart rejoice. Even all these rough fishermen seem heroes. And I daresay they have done many heroic acts, battled with waves and storms, and saved lives.

"'They that go down to the sea in ships,' see and do wonderful things. They feel themselves so much in the power of the Almighty, that they rely like children on His help, and thus do and dare deeds that common mortals shrink from.

"And yet they seem to know when one among their number deserves true praise, for they were all so eager to tell my aunt about the admiral now coming in his barge to their church, and were so delighted when they discovered she knew him well by report.

"'I believe there is no country where he has not been,' said my aunt, 'and everywhere he has left a good name behind him.'

"'Ay, Ma'am, thou'st in the right there. Ben Spurling (thon's Ben's father, he were born and bred here), Ma'am, Ben Spurling has hed the luck to sail three times wi' un. Ane time in those lonesome, wearisome Arctic seas, and anither at the vary t'other end of the warld, where Ben says as they comed to a land made oop of ashes and nought else ; and, lastly, he wor wi' un at the war, and if ever there wor a place where summat hot were gangin' on, his cappen (he wor a cappen then) put his ship. Monny a gran' hadmiral hae been here times on times, but it's most part hevery thing gladsome, as Ben Spurling's fine cappen, now a famous hadmiral, be come. He be joost for all the world like a friend noo.'

"'Gossip,' whispered my gossip to me, 'think of our havin' such an adventure, and all owing to Captain Crabshawe, for if he had not made his ill-natured remark about our desire to show off our bonnets, etc., etc., to the Rampton world, we should not have come to Exe church.'

"'Do you know, Clara, I could almost love him for it. Think of our not only seeing an admiral, but an admirable admiral.'

"'And still more this wonderful churchyard with all its solemn records.'

"'Yes, indeed—oh ! Clara, it makes me long to be good.'

"And then I could say no more. I felt rising in my heart strange and inexplicable thoughts, that gave me very solemn feelings. I was glad when my aunt proposed that we should go into church. I longed to kneel down and pray. I could not help thinking of all the drowned people, and the mourning relatives that had so often come down to this primitive, strange old church. What prayers must have been uttered here ! Such cries to God for comfort, such petitions for re-

signation, such beseechings for a meeting, never to part more ! This church, so rudely fashioned, so unadorned, so simple, yet grand, seemed to me sanctified by real prayers that had gone straight from the heart to the throne of God.

"So would I pray this very day, a little heedless, thoughtless creature usually ; but to-day, this hour, a thinking, humble, supplicating soul, who was never more to lose the impression of this solemn time.

"Some people came into the same pew with us, but I did not like to disturb my thoughts by looking at them.

"We were singing that beautiful hymn, 'Thy will be done ;' and as we did so, I recalled to mind what little Bessie had told us, regarding the Lord's Prayer :

"We must always make a pause between each petition, that we may think of what we are saying, for our old nurse used to tell my brothers and me that an evil spirit is always watching to distract our thoughts, which is the reason so many people say the Lord's Prayer heedlessly.'

"Mrs. Spooner thinks the real reason is that we say it so often our tongues run it off too glibly for us to pause ; but I think the old nurse is right—I find there is a sort of spell against my saying it wholly undistracted, short as it is.

"As I thought this, I looked up and saw a face, a pair of eyes looking into mine, that reminded me rather of a good spirit than a bad.

"They were large, kindly, gentle eyes. I felt glad we were singing out of the same book, saying the same prayers. God was so good as to fill my heart with pure and happy thoughts. I felt that if I was told I must die, that death was coming for me, that I should go, even as suddenly as the poor drowned people had been summoned away, that it would not make me sorrowful. I should be content to sigh out my soul in the presence of the Almighty. But now the service was over ; we were to leave this holy, sacred church.

"My aunt had settled that we should wait at Exe for afternoon service, and I was glad to think that we might spend some more time, and learn some more lessons from the tombstone. But such a thing happened ! Of course I did not think the famous admiral was there—I saw no one that could be taken for him.

"But suddenly, standing close by me, I saw the gentleman who sang out of the same book with me in church. I suppose he felt as I did, that this act had introduced us to each other, for he said :

"The admiral begs me to ask if any of your party would

like to see his vessel? She is quite new, and supposed to be a perfect specimen of her class. He is off again to-morrow.'

"And so he really was there. Absolutely this admirable admiral was standing close by—a little dark unpretentious man, talking to Ben Spurling's old father, and shaking him by the hand.

"'Gossip, you look disappointed,' whispered Clara to me. 'I have noticed that almost all sailors are little insignificant-looking men.'

"'Nay,' whispered I back again, 'look at his friend.'

"'He is not a sailor,' said she.

"'He is.'

"'I swear it, gossip.'

"'Oh! don't, Clara—I love sailors so.'

"'He is a soldier.'

"While we thus quarrelled, my aunt was being introduced to the admiral, to whom she tendered her thanks for his obliging offer. Said she to us afterwards, in order to account for a slight hesitation on her part—

"'I was in fear at first that to accept it would be an infringement of our challenge, but I think there was no article against our visiting a ship; and even if there had been, we should not have been worthy of our name as Englishwomen if we would not have forfeited our chance for the still greater honour of visiting an admiral.'

"We all echoed this heroic speech of my aunt's, especially now that the visit was over.

"The admiral took us in his own barge, and two officers, in fine naval uniforms, went ahead of us to prepare what the admiral called a 'gangway,' and to tell his steward that ladies were coming to luncheon. And it was the most delightful thing possible to feel ourselves so carefully regarded, and put into a chair, with the honoured flag of Old England wrapped round us, and hoisted up on deck as if we were the most precious and valuable things in the world.

"'I feel,' whispered I to Clara, 'just as if I was the Queen. How do you feel?'

"'I am in the predicament of knowing that we are highly honoured and flattered by all this attention; at the same time, I am called upon to act as if I was the condescending party.'

"'Just so; one would almost believe by their manner that this was the proudest moment of their lives. I wish all men were sailors.'

“‘Your singing friend is a soldier.’

“‘I am sure he is not.’ (Unkind Clara !)

“But, oh ! dear me—after all, she was right.

“As we were seated at luncheon, my aunt, having made some remark about the admiral’s services, ‘of which she could not but be aware, as every Englishwoman ought,’ says she (my aunt is so clever at saying just the nicest things in the world in just the nicest way), then answered the admiral :

“‘Hah ! I have not introduced you to a much greater hero—let me make my friend Lionel known to you as Colonel Erne.’

“Goodness gracious !—to think of us poor female mortals, who were not fit company for Captain Crabshawe, sitting with and talking to such heroes. And I had been singing out of the same book with him, and perhaps all the time he had his Victoria Cross in his waistcoat pocket.

“And he saw Clara nod and smile at me, and he asked me why she did so, and I was obliged to tell, and the admiral laughed heartily ; and I really did not know whether it would not be better for me to run away and jump overboard, only the admiral was just like a school-boy, and I began to be not the least afraid of him.

“All this time I must not forget to say that we left Susan, at her own request, behind, under the care of the old avaricious herring man, who, in his Sunday clothes, seemed quite a different sort of person—clean, sensible, and amiable.

“Susan cared nothing for the honour of the invitation made by the admiral himself.

“‘I hae overmuch ’o men’s coompany at onny time, Miss Kate, when there’s onny one,’ said she ; ‘and fur to go fur to find mysel’ wi’ nout else, is what I niver will do for onny-body.’

“The ship was such a splendid fellow, and we saw lots of curiosities, and the admiral told us long stories of the Arctic regions, which he had visited twice—once as a boy ; he would not talk of his own exploits in the Black Sea or anywhere, but all his anecdotes were of other people.

“Of course it came out that we were staying at Luff, because he asked how it happened that there were lights in the house hitherto uninhabited.

“After a while, my aunt told him why we were there, and all about the challenge. Upon which the admiral went from one fit of laughing into another, saying between each,—

"'You will win—of course you will win ! Not a doubt—is there, Lionel ?'

"Lionel was that gentleman who was so good as to sing out of the same book with me. But he did not laugh, he only said,—

"'Is it possible that there are creatures, calling themselves men, who voluntarily absent themselves from the society of ladies ?'

"I only wish Captain Crabshawe had seen him as he said these words. For my part, I think, if he has an opportunity, he will be, some of these days, as great a hero as Nelson.

"'Ha ! ha ! they have not been to sea, have they, Lionel ? They would know better if they had.'

"And the admiral laughed more than ever.

"Now, what do you think the admiral said ? I would not repeat it, but perhaps an admiral may never say the same thing of me again. And I could not help seeing that he meant me, because my aunt was the only one near, and she is not a girl. Clara was down in the cabin with Bessie, and Mrs. Spooner was looking at the compass far away. But after all, I won't say what it was, it does not become a person, lately in the company of such heroes, to be guilty of vanity ; though, indeed, it is not vanity."

Mrs. Joscelyn here begins to write :—

"But I shall tell—I heard it. The admiral said, in what was meant for a whisper,—

"'That is an uncommonly pretty girl.'

"And his friend answered,—

"'I never saw a prettier.'

"And indeed my pretty Kate did look wonderfully bewitching, she had such a colour on her cheeks, and such a glow in her eyes, that I did not wonder they admired her. As for the two officers in uniform, they devoured her by looks.

"Clara whispered to me that she was rather disappointed in the admiral, as regarded his being a hero. He was too young, too merry, too boyish. She could not bring herself to think that he had even been in danger, much less faced it, as a boy, with such resolute courage, in the dreary Arctic seas. But before very long she changed her opinion.

"Little Bessie, to whom he seemed to take a vast fancy, and to whom he chattered as if he was of her own age (which makes me remark that your really great man assim-

lates himself to the nature of a child with far greater ease than one who is famous for nothing), little Bessie said,

“Sir Admiral, did you ever feel frightened when you were all alone in the Arctic seas, with nothing but ice and snow—desolation and horror all around?”

“He had listened to her with a smile, then he became grave; he took off his spectacles, and, looking at her with gentle serious eyes, answered,

“My dear, God was there.”

“And this is the secret of his greatness! He is religious—he loves God; he has only one fear, namely, that he may not love Him enough.

“Ah!” whispered Clara once more to me, ‘how I have misjudged him! I can now understand how a true hero is generally a good man!’

“I never saw anyone so delighted as the admiral was at the history of our challenge. He flatters us by saying we must win. When I say flatters, I consider it so from him. For my part, I have already announced that we must win. Not from any superior merit in us, not because we have more patience, more endurance, and more pluck, but because we sacrifice less. Very little makes a woman happy who is reasonable; and time goes quickly with them, even if their employments are a little frivolous. But with men, alas! my poor squire, I feel for you. For your sake I begin to wish I had not cared about my summer curtains!

“But let me describe the beautiful screw yacht; that is, give up all idea of describing her, and merely express the wonder and delight with which we surveyed and examined her. For my part, when I considered the beauty of her construction, and the skill with which she was put together, when I saw her order and completeness, the majesty of her shape in the water, and the grace and ease with which she floated, I was impressed with both wonder and awe.

“If God permitted the creature he had made out of the dust to create for himself, by the comprehensiveness of his own wit, and the force of his own energy, a magnificent floating life-like thing as this ship; made her obey him with merely a turn of the hand, trusted himself in her, as if she was his mother, in the fiercest storm, in the wildest tempest; loving her as his home on earth, his safest, dearest, happiest abiding place; what might we not expect in another and a better world? What is man, or the son of a man, that God should so regard him?

“Such thoughts were very fitting for this holy day. They

filled my heart as we were being rowed back to attend the afternoon service at Exe. The two gentlemen came with us, and together we walked among the tombstones, being still rather early for the service.

"Being alone with Arabella for a few moments, I said,

"If you have no objection, I have not, to forfeit our chance of winning the challenge. To have the honour of entertaining an admiral, all other things should be forgotten ; and so, if you do not object, we will ask them to Luff to take a cup of tea."

"Very far from it ; I agree with you that no one for a moment ever calculated upon this extraordinary circumstance. It would be quite wicked of us to fail in giving him due honours !"

"Of course it would not do for us, only a company of ladies, to ask them to dinner, but merely a visit of half-an-hour, and the offer of a cup of tea, I think we ought to propose —"

"Pray do it, and if the gentlemen are affronted, why, let them be affronted, that's all I say !"

"I do not suppose they will be affronted, because, like us, they must feel a national pride in seeing men so worthily renowned, and much more in holding intercourse with them ; but they will immediately settle at once that we have lost the challenge."

"Let them do so, the cause demands it ; and perhaps, after all, it will be a good thing, and we may get away all the sooner."

"What ! tired !—tired already, Arabella ?"

"No, not exactly tired—but in truth, I do miss Augustus. Though you are all very kind, and I ought to be happy, yet somehow I feel the want of him every minute, to consult with and talk to."

"My dear, I am heartily glad to hear you say so. I hope, before we leave Luff, I shall see you quite thin, through pining for him."

"Oh ! no, I am not so silly as that. No, I thank you ; Augustus left me of his own accord—Augustus must ask, and very humbly, too, to be restored to my favour."

"Ah ! well, settle it your own way. Let us go and take our places."

"When service was over, and we were preparing to return to our island home, I asked the admiral and his friend to accompany us and partake of some tea.

"We shall certainly do ourselves the honour of taking

you safely home, but, as for landing—does not that peril the winning of the challenge? We would die for want of a drop of tea sooner than be the cause of such a catastrophe.’

“‘Pray do not think of the challenge, but rather of the honour that you will do us.’

“‘By no means. I know enough of the female sex to be aware that they ardently embrace every opportunity of self-sacrifice. It becomes our duty as men to make the sacrifice for them. Lionel, I give up that delicious, desirable cup of tea.’

“‘So do I. A cup of poison would be preferable under the circumstances.’

“‘We appreciate such noble conduct, all the more from feeling ourselves in a manner somewhat in disgrace with your sex. Nevertheless, I am not sure if we have not already forfeited our claim to win. I fear we ought not to have gone on board the yacht.’

“‘You think they will cavil about that, do you, Madam?’

“‘Alas! that I must allow it of our lords and masters now at Puff, I do.’

“‘Then we will put them into the same predicament. After we have landed the ladies, Lionel, we will proceed to Puff. If you and I cannot manage to beguile the gentlemen to dine with us on board the yacht, why, we don’t deserve to be in Her Majesty’s service!’

“‘We don’t. I will go to the Horse Guards and resign my commission.’

“‘Oh! how nice!’ exclaimed Kate; ‘and you won’t say anything about us?’

“‘No, not until dinner is over, and they are about to go back.’

“‘Oh! capital! Then they can say nothing against us.’

“‘Now, I should like a reward, Bessie.’

“‘Dear Sir Admiral, if I can do it, it is done.’

“‘Well, it is this—I am very fond of cream, and, in foregoing your mother’s proffered cup of tea, I lose a great treat; if I send a boat here in the morning early, do you think you can spare me a little cream for my breakfast?’

“‘Dear Mister—Sir Admiral—you shall have a jugful, and some fresh butter made yesterday by Clara and Kate.’

“‘Ha,’ said the colonel, ‘I dote on fresh butter.’

“Our ‘gushing’ feminine hearts being now relieved on the score of hospitality, we were enabled to take a very friendly farewell. They, of course, did not land, and, after watching us arrive at our palace in safety, they departed for Puff.

"We all sat down in a state of chatteration and excitement that was very unbecoming a Sabbath evening. Each one had something more wonderful to tell than the other.

"He told me such stories of that darling admiral," said Kate; "I happened to say how nice I thought him. "Nice," he exclaimed, "my dear Miss Daintree, there is not a hair of his head that is not nicer and better than anything you ever met with. You see how his sailors adore him; you heard his character before you saw him; you can perceive how I dote on everything he says and does, because he is so simple, so noble, so purely good. But if you want to know what he really is, go to his own home."

"But may one ask, without offence," interrupted Clara, "who is the "he" that confided so much to my gossip?"

"That "he" also confided in me," said Mrs. Joscelyn, pitying the confusion of the little gossip. "In the eyes of the world the admiral is a hero—a hero by never-ceasing vigilant fulfilling of duty—a hero by patience, fortitude, and perseverance—but, to his family he is a domestic hero. He told me it is a matter of perfect indifference to his wife whether the sun shines or not—she is provided at home with perpetual sunshine. And as for his sons and daughters, they lose their best-loved, chiefest playmate when he is not there."

"I could not fancy him a hero at first," said Clara, "he was so boyishly full of fun; but how wonderfully quick he was in seeing that we should compromise our chance of winning the challenge if they accepted our offer of a cup of tea! And how sagacious finding so capital a remedy, if our visit to the yacht should chance to be thrown at our poor heads. These little traits show that, under all his gaiety and light-heartedness, he never forgets what it is most right to do. Then the colonel—eh! gossip?"

"Why me?" answers the little gossip, blushing in a most violent manner.

"You appeared to like singing out of the same hymn-book with him as much in the afternoon as the morning."

"It would have been rude to refuse."

"But this afternoon we had a supply of hymn-books sufficient for all of us."

"The little gossip turned away.

"I think he is the most wonderfully handsome man I ever saw. His eyes have a look something like the look of Augustus in former days."

("Oh! oh!" quite aside, not even in the Journal, but understood between the reader and writer. Poor dear Augustus!

with his parted hair, his likeness to—however, let us not be ill-natured.)

“The little gossip turned back. A speechless indignation flashed from her eyes. Fortunately Mrs. Spooner was in a reverie.

“‘Ah!’ she murmured, ‘dear Augustus—happy admiral, he was going where Augustus is. Why, oh! why did I not send a mes-sage about his flannel waistcoats?’

“‘The yacht leaves to-morrow at noon,’ said Clara; ‘she will have landed her stores. Colonel Erne says that is the only thing he does not like in the admiral, he is always in such a hurry. “Now,” continued he, “I should like to stay here until the challenge is over; and the admiral could have his fresh cream every morning, and I could come and fetch it. But you’ll see he won’t perceive what a comfortable state of things that would be. He will be off, I know, spite of all my entreaties.”’

“‘Where will he go to from here?’ I asked.

“‘He is going all round the coast; and he will be passing back this way in about a fortnight. Ha! I have an idea. Yes, my fine admiral! you may be as peremptory as you please, but I am not on duty—I can do as I like.”’

“‘I asked him what he meant; and he answered that when the screw yacht went out on her errands, the person in command—admiral or captain—was allowed to take friends; and he, Colonel Erne, happened this time to be the friend, and was not peremptorily tied to the yacht, but by the links of friendship.’

“‘“I was very nearly not coming; and only think what I should have lost!” he added; looking at you, gossip.’

“‘Why me?’ asks gossip, quite confused.

“‘He thought you such a pretty girl!’

“‘Is it not comfortable to be considered such superior beings, after being so snubbed! I feel quite a disposition to be as good again as I really am, in order to do justice to the high opinion our two new friends seem to entertain of our sex.’

“‘That would be called vanity by some people; and, after all, it is nothing but a most praiseworthy desire to be worthy of the commendation.’

“‘But there is a species of empty flattery that men sometimes adopt towards women, which is truly nauseating,’ said our haughty, imperious Clara; ‘having been disgusted with that, what balm it is to be duly appreciated! To hear it said that, because we are women, we are good and true, to be beloved,

Our very sex makes us angels in the heart of a good man ; and he would feel more keenly than ourselves any blot that marred what he considered so perfect. He who treats a woman with courtly deference, yet with a proper sense of his own dignified position towards her, is worthy to be loved, as mortals can love.'

"How earnest you are, Clara !' half laughed Mrs. Spooner.

"I feel very deeply on the subject, though I cannot say I have had much experience ; still, I know enough to be sure that, if men treated women properly, there would be very few bad ones in the world.'

"That is an assertion I am hardly prepared to carry out, Clara, with my much longer experience.'

"Oh ! yes, Mrs. Joscelyn, you are—give a woman credit for being perfect, and she will do her best not to forfeit it. Women are so large and magnanimous in their dispositions. They will give way, give up, on the mere supposition that by so doing they can please some one they love.'

"And men ?'

"Certainly not. They reason over what is required of them to do—they argue on it ; they destroy the first blush of the beauty of the sacrifice, and eventually it is not worth the having when it is unwillingly extracted.'

"Oh ! mamma,' said Bessie, running in, ' Susan is in quite a pet because no one will help her to cook the dinner.'

"Good lack, and the cloth not laid either ! Who could suppose that, locked up in the island of Luff, we should have met with adventures that made us forget our usual duties and that on Sunday evening, too !'

"It has certainly been a most exciting day.'

"What a lucky thing we came to Luff !—it would not have happened otherwise.'

"To be sure not—do, some one, write that down in the Journal. It will be an excellent thing for our lords to know, when the challenge is over, that we are indebted to them for spending a Sunday of most absorbing interest—one we are never likely to forget for many reasons, the chief of which is, the seeing, speaking to, and being on such familiar terms with a famous admiral.'

"And I feel as if I had only to recollect that churchyard, to be humbly grateful for my happy life.'

"And then that grand old primitive church—truly a house of prayer !'

"With these feelings, no wonder that this, our first Sunday at Luff, ended in feelings of solem happiness and peace."



CHAPTER XI.

PUFF! PUFF!

THE squire rose in the morning still so full of Scruttles and his story, that all shame for those abominable revokes was utterly gone. Indeed, it may be said with truth he never felt any for them. But there was a shame, an honest shame, swelling the heart of our worthy squire. It was the shame that a good man feels when he is brought face to face with a depraved nature.

It being Sunday morning, the squire dressed as if he was going to church, though there was no possibility of doing so. The three other gentlemen paid the same respect to the day, but Captain Crabshawe presented himself in the suit of a decayed gamekeeper. It was true he had not burdened himself with many garments, and if, as appearances seemed to warrant, he had brought but two suits, necessity obliged him to wear the most efficient for work on week-days. A good day's shooting, to look at the one he now wore, might have permanently finished its career.

After breakfast, which was rendered rather pleasant by an attempt at comfort, not to say elegance, for they had a clean table-cloth and some fresh water-cresses, the good squire made no secret of taking out his Bible and prayer-book. With both tucked under his arm, and a cigar in his mouth, he took up a sunny position under one of the cliffs.

While smoking, he delivered himself over to the difficult task of thinking—an employment which always furrowed his fine open brow. The cigar finished, he gave up thinking, and opened his prayer-book, in which he might be noticed reading with all his heart and soul the whole service, going through it all in the most orthodox and pious manner.

Apparently pleased with himself and his employment, he

rose from it in high satisfaction, and, to express this fully, he lit another cigar.

Strolling towards their palace, he encountered Scruttles coming to wash the potatoes in a primitive manner at the well.

Part of the squire's cogitations had been about Scruttles. He was conjecturing to himself the best mode of opening a germ of interest in the heart of the "excellent convict," which would bud forth into flowers, and eventually produce fruit.

His knowledge of human nature made him steadily reject overtures of a promissory or conditional kind. His desire was to do Scruttles permanent good. If he got him to swear all sorts of oaths regarding his future conduct, under promise of certain rewards, he felt sure that Scruttles would be forsworn. Thus, so far from doing him good, he would only add to the already monstrous mountain of his sins.

No, the squire felt that, like Sal's master, he must contrive to excite an interest in that strange black thing that no doubt did duty for the heart of the "excellent convict." One white line had been discovered in it, namely, that involuntary respect that Scruttles shared with even the devils themselves, for true, honest virtue. Scruttles must not only entertain a liking, but a certain respect, for the person who was to do him good.

The squire shook his head over the respect. It was new to him to feel that upon his actions, his words, a human soul might be perilled or saved. He acted so much upon the impulse of the moment, that he could not credit himself with any extraordinary merit. The Almighty had been so merciful as not to make him hate himself, through the power of some low vice in his organisation ; nevertheless, he was but a man after all.

And a man, as the squire was fain to allow to himself, as weak as any woman in the matter of self-control.

Having, therefore, with infinite labour of thought, delivered himself of all intentions to vie with Sal's master in goodness, it remained to interest the "excellent convict" in a totally different manner.

Without entering into any great depth of thought on the matter, or losing himself in a metaphysical inquiry as to the roots of the question, bringing to bear upon it all the ramifications of ideas that so prolific a subject could produce, the squire decided to open the campaign by action rather than implication.

In a word, he took five shillings out of his pocket, and presented it, then and there, to the "excellent convict."

The worthy creature so far corroborated the squire's notion, that "money will buy anything," that he became pleasingly transfixed with amazement. His basket of potatoes, placed just under the spout of the well, was heedlessly kicked over, in an involuntary expression of delight. It was evident that five shillings was an uncommon sight to Scruttles, insignificant as such a sum may appear to ordinary mortals. Five shillings was a thing to be gazed at as a curiosity; and as he gazed (excuse us, reader, what is history worth without the truth?) Scruttles slowly, with emphasis, with expression, spit upon that five shillings.

"For luck, yer honour!" he said, in explanation.

"I hope so," answered the squire, who now felt it was his duty, under any circumstances, to follow the clue established between him and Scruttles. "I give you that for the trouble I gave you last night."

"Axing yer honour's parding, it were a trouble."

"I wish you had told us the truth, Scruttles."

"Axing yer honour's parding, I hadn't time, yer honour."

"What do you mean?"

"I were tuk wi' the flutters, please yer honour; and when I has the flutters, I mostly knows nothing at all of anythink, axing yer parding, Sir!"

"But surely it was easier to tell what really occurred to you than inventing a parcel of—I may say very ugly and useless lies?"

"Axing yer honour's parding, I didn't go for to think as yer honour wanted fur to know the beginnings and endings of your 'umble servant. I were thinking in coorse as yer honour thowt to 'ave a bit of bemusement like. I'll coom again, yer honour, and settle it all reecht," added Scruttles, gazing at his five shillings, with a sort of vague idea in his brain that he might gain as much more.

"No, no; I do not wish to hear any more; but go on washing your potatoes, and we will talk another time."

"Ay, yer honour, we've mostly a hep o' time for chat in the evenin's, Sir—axing yer honour's parding."

The squire walked away. He felt intuitively that the five shillings must be left to make its own impression, unsupported by advice or lectures. On his way he encountered Spooner, who, stretching his arms and indulging in a vast yawn, yet said, in the most cheery manner,

"Glorious day, Squire! I have been drinking the fresh

air in great gulps, and sunning myself in this delicious blaze, like a turtle! What a world it is we live in, Squire!—heavenly, by Jove! And this life is so delightful, as the poet says, I forget whom—

‘Sweet was the scene : apart the cedars stood—
A sunny islet opened in the wood,
With vernal tints ——’ ”

“I don’t understand poetry, my dear Spooner—unless it is a good song. Poetry has such a round-about way of telling the truth.”

“Pardon me, Squire, that is allowable. Poetical license has now become a proverb ; and, believe me, without poetry, what a dull, hum-drum, prosaic life we should lead. The gems, the pearls, the beautiful bits I could repeat to you, Squire ——”

“No, I thank you, Spooner—I fancy it is nearly lunch time. At home I have always remarked how hungry I am on a Sunday, and I put it down to going to church. But I am just as hungry now, when I have not been to church at all.”

“That is a most curious psychological study, my dear Squire—one upon which volumes could be written, had one the time.”

“I don’t recommend you to begin, as I, for one, would never find the time to read it. It is enough for me that I always feel hungry on a Sunday.”

“Well, ’tis a healthy feeling, and no doubt, psychologically considered, might be brought forward as proof that Sunday has that invigorating power which a day of rest ought to produce.”

“And my opinion is that it is a remarkably sleepy day, also ; which I put down to the simple fact that, having nothing particular to do after church is over, one pays attention to one’s stomach, which, overloaded, naturally produces drowsiness, and if your psychologists can write a volume upon such a simple fact, why, they are cleverer people than I took them for.”

“It is extraordinary the mines of thought that arise from the contemplation of the simplest actions. It is in pauses of life, such as we are now enjoying, that one can realise for a short space the worlds of fancy and creative power so beautifully expressed by Byron—no, Wordsworth ——”

“Ha! here’s Frank with his apron on—now we shall know what is for luncheon !”

"Have either of you," asks Frank, "seen Scruttles?—he ought to have returned from washing the potatoes some time ago."

"I am afraid I detained him talking—here he comes ! What are you going to give us, Frank ?"

"I meant to have given you an omelette, but all our eggs are finished. I then thought to roast a rabbit, but there is not one skinned and prepared. I looked at the beef to broil some steaks, but I took the inside of the sirloin yesterday, and if I cut off more, there will not be enough for dinner. Finally, Sam has placed on the table the bread, the cheese, the butter, also the pepper, the salt, and the mustard—and there are the potatoes, when boiled."

The squire laughed good-humouredly, saying—

"I hope the boat will come early to-morrow—we seem in want of everything."

"Yes, it is most astonishing to me how the things disappear. I imagined we had rats about the place, but I never heard of rats carrying off half-a-pound of pepper, two bricks of salt, almost as big as you, and divers and sundries of equally odd things. Scruttles thinks they have melted, but I never heard that coffee was given that way, or spices, or an unopened bottle of Worcester sauce—to say nothing of a pair of my shooting socks."

"That is remarkable, indeed, Summers ; no one can have stolen such things, because common sense tells one they can do nothing with them here. They must be mislaid."

"The fact is," says Frank, "Puff must be haunted ; however, I am anxious to meet a ghost, so I will make it my business to keep a sharp look-out for him."

It was rather odd that Mr. Summers appeared to address himself to the "excellent convict" rather than the gentlemen, and that worthy creature seemed to feel it, for he suddenly took himself off—out of sight !

"I think," observed Sir George, coming forward, and looking still more sleepy and lazy than Spooner, "that we made a great mistake not going to Rampton to church. It is so confounded dull here !"

"Haven't you read your prayers ?"

"No, what's the good ? What does one have clergymen for, but to do it for us ?"

"I shall be very happy to act parson, after luncheon, gentlemen. I am at present your patient log-man, for I cut the wood for your fires. I am, though an inferior artist, your cook. I endeavour to please you, as housemaid, making your beds,

sweeping your floors, and arranging your furniture. I will now strive to be your parson."

"Thanks, my dear Frank; to tell you the truth, I do not exactly know what we should do without you?"

"And do you know the reason why, Squire?"

"No."

"Because I endeavour to imitate the numerous and unselfish virtues of a woman!"

"Oh!—oh!—treason!—treason!"

As King Crab uttered these words, he emerged out of a corner without his coat, a needle and thread in his hand.

"Why, you are doing woman's work now!"

"Of course, I undertook to do whatever they did!"

"My wife never sews on a Sunday."

"Works of necessity, my dear Squire, are allowed. Besides, your wife has nothing in the world to do all day, poor soul, but sew! Therefore she is glad of a rest on Sunday."

"Well, if it is not against your conscience to sew on a Sunday, I shall be glad if you will put a button on my shooting-coat?"

"With immense pleasure!" cried the captain, glowing with gratified delight.

The squire went gravely up for his coat, and felt in the pocket for a button that had come off the day before. He was a tidy man, was the squire, and was glad to have his button sewn on. If the captain had no scruples about Sunday, why should he?

He carried the coat and button into the captain's sanctum.

"Leave it here, Squire, and I will bring it out to you in a trice, all right."

But the squire loved his garments. He had no idea of leaving so precious a thing as his coat to the unclean mercies of Captain Crabshawe's sanctum. There were all sorts of untidinesses, not to say nastinesses, strewed about on the table and apparently taken out of the royal pockets of King Crab.

There was a rabbit's tail, considerably disagreeable to the nose—the webbed foot of a gull, also too old to be pleasant—a bit of beeswax—a remarkably dirty pocket-handkerchief—two or three crusts of bread, that had been partially buttered, which butter—but enough. Simply, to allow his dear coat to leave his own hands for a moment, and come into juxtaposition with any of these articles, was an impossibility. He would rather wear it without any buttons on at all.

King Crab, seeing the state of the squire's feelings, suffered his vanity to conquer his nerve opiniatum.

"Very well ; hold your coat, it's all the same to me how I do it."

But it appeared that, in pleasing his vanity in one respect, he was grievously affronting her in another.

After a deal of manœuvring, which, in a woman would have been called coquetry, Crabshawe brought out of his pocket a case—out of the case spectacles, which, with much care, he adjusted on his nose.

"What ! Crab !" shouts the squire (for his ordinary speech is so remarkably loud, that when astonished, he cannot help but shout), "come to spectacles ; who would ——"

"Hush ! Squire—hush ! not so loud. These are not spectacles, they are magnifiers. No one ever threads a needle without them."

"Elizabeth does—and little Bessie, too."

"They use bodkins ; I confine myself entirely to needles, owing to their sharper points. There is a vast deal of difference between bodkins and needles."

"I should think so ! Bodkins have tape for thread."

"My dear Squire, you are quite deceived. Now, don't breathe so hard, it affects the thread, which sometimes is most obstinate. Ha ! there, 'tis done ; my needle is threaded, Squire ; and now for the knot—but stay ! for a button, double thread is the thing !"

"True for you !" remarks the squire, admiringly.

"Now for the knot."

Never was such vexatious thread, or such a vixenish knot. Either the thread would not be knotted, or the knot being made, suddenly disappeared. At last, in despair, the captain laid the needle carefully down, and taking the refractory ends in both hands, he achieved a knot that might have been made of rope for the trouble it gave him. But at last all was ready—needle, thread, and knot. Notwithstanding this desirable state of things, King Crab still paused.

"To tell you the truth, Squire, I am always in a little bit of a puzzle as to whether one begins with the coat or the button."

"True, that's a devil of a puzzle ; it reminds me of that pretty little French woman who said that she never could remember whether to say cock-weather or weather-cock. Let us ask one of the others."

"No—no, it will come to me quite naturally when I have got hold of the coat."

Vanity was not going to permit King Crab to show himself off in magnifiers, lest they should be mistaken for spectacles. And now the squire's beloved coat was in those hands—those unwashed hands of Captain Crabshawe. First it was placed one way, then another, then upside down, then inside out. Finally, inspiration condescended to visit King Crab, and in a short space of time the needle was seen coming through the coat within an inch of the proper place.

"Hurrah!" exclaims the squire, "here she is!—very near, Crab

Crab tries again, and this time hits the exact spot so nearly, as to feel it would be tempting Providence to try again. Consequently, he slowly, triumphantly draws the needle forth, then the thread, nervously as the knot approaches nearer. Finally, the knot does its duty, and refuses to go further. Captain Crabshawe gives a little tug—the knot resists; he gives a harder one with the same effect. Satisfied, he breathes freely, and remarks—

"I knew it was a capital knot!"

Full of gratified importance, he is about to put the needle through again, when the squire reminds him of the button.

"Ha! true—I was thinking so much of the knot, I forgot the button."

The button is soon in its place. It is held on to the coat with the grasp of a man saving himself from being drowned by clutching the branch of a tree. Crab makes one or two excellent shots with his needle to and fro, which excite the squire's warmest approbation. At last he bungles—there is one hole in the button that is most aggravating. In endeavouring to force the needle through it, *volens volens*—the point becomes seriously damaged.

"Come, it does not matter—the button is on and fast, which is all we want, Squire—therefore, I'll fasten off."

"But Elizabeth always goes like this," said the squire, winding the thread round the button.

"Well, it is not a bad plan—I will do it if you like, though unnecessary, in my opinion."

The squire considered it more orthodox that it should be done. So it was done, until so much thread was wound round, the button looked as if it had a sore throat, and had enveloped it in a sort of necktie. But at last the coat was delivered up to the squire by the captain, who declared the button was as safe as a church.

"So it ought to be," said Frank, peeping in, "for you have

been nearly half-an-hour sewing it on. Luncheon is quite cold."

"Pray say potatoes, Frank, for I am more hungry than ever, and you know there is nothing else."

"Mrs. Joscelyn would have sewn it on in two minutes."

"Pooh, Summers! Thank goodness I am not Mrs. Joscelyn."

"Thank goodness Mrs. Joscelyn is not you."

"You may say so, but perhaps she does not."

"I will give her credit for having the same opinions as myself—meantime, while you are eating your luncheon ——"

"Potatoes, Frank."

"Of potatoes, will you help George through a serious difficulty? He has only one clean shirt left."

"The boat comes to-morrow with the clean linen."

"But I want my shirt this evening, and I have not a clean one for to-morrow."

There was no answer to this distressing tale, which, perhaps, was caused by the fact that Sir George's hearers did not feel the case so acutely as he did.

"You see, Crab," continued Sir George, fretfully, "women are of use—what in the world should we do without laundresses?"

"Laundresses!—pooh! I have washed my own shirt many a time."

"And ironed it?"

"To be sure, and wrung it out, too, better than any laundress ever did! Besides, there are machines now, and it would be a good spec to send for one. You put your shirt in at one end, Follett, and it comes out at the other ready to put on."

"An American dodge, I conclude," says Frank.

"But is it starched and aired?" asked Sir George.

"Of course, though why you want your things aired when you have your own body on which to air them, is a mystery to me. I thought that was a folly confined to women."

"Since you have mentioned women, Crab, hear my resolve; I won't wash my own clothes—I WILL have them done by a WOMAN!"

"Don't roar, Squire—I was only joking. Of course I don't mean you absolutely to wash. I was merely mentioning this machine, which at once proves we are not dependent on a woman to wash our shirts."

"You may say what you like; my private opinion is that,

as regards washing, woman is much the best machine you can have !”

“Take your own way, Squire—I have learnt one thing during the last week, and that is, Mrs. Joscelyn has a deal to put up with.”

This remark tickled the squire’s fancy. He retired to a corner, and chuckled over it until he fell asleep.

Spooner and Follett had already exhausted their capabilities that way ; and so went for what they call a stroll.

Frank put on his apron to make, as he said, preparations for dinner.

Had anyone peeped into the captain’s sanctum, they would have seen him, magnifiers on nose, doing what he called “darning.”

Over which he also fell asleep.

At four o’clock the squire awoke, cheerful and content.

He found Frank enlarging the mind of Scruttles on various points.

“Why, Frank, I thought you were going to be a parson, and read the evening service to us?”

“The parson was ready, but there was no congregation !”

“I will go and call them.”

By dint of great exertion, Spooner and Follett had got up enough drowsiness to take another nap. They gladly obeyed the squire’s call. Spooner had consulted his whiskers so often as to what he should do, that they were, every hair, standing apart, and he looked a wild man of the woods.

King Crab was not to be roused. So Frank read the psalms and lessons (he would do no more) to a congregation of three people. By the time this was done it was only half-past four.

“What are we to do with ourselves !” sighed Sir George ; “two hours and a half to dinner, and no pleasure in anticipating its arrival. On the contrary, the less we think of it the better.”

“If we had anything to cook, we might have amused ourselves with each concocting a new dish,” remarked Spooner.

“But as we have not, it is the best not to think about it.”

“We ought to have made Sam and Scruttles attend Frank’s efforts as parson.”

“Do you think they care about that sort of thing?”

“They have souls as well as ourselves, I suppose !”

“It is a remarkable fact,” says Mr. Spooner, “that a man may have a soul, and yet be ignorant of the fact.”

"How do you make that out?"

"His conscience, you know, is deadened !

'Breathes there a man with soul so dead—
Who never to himself has said ——'"

"That we are remarkably dull. I wonder what the ladies are doing?"

"They meant to go to Exe church !"

"By-the-bye, suppose we have a row out, and go and reconnoitre Luff?"

"Would that be fair?"

"Of course it would ; the sea is a highway !"

"I should like to go and see that two-funnelled fellow that came into the bay last night. Let us have out the boat, and row round her."

"But I must cook the dinner, Squire."

"Pooh, Frank, there is nothing but that lump of beef. It must be a stupidity passing the ordinary bounds of servants' brains, if Sam and Scruttles cannot roast those few bones without spoiling them."

"I should not mind, if we had anything else to eat?"

"Then roast it at once, and let us dine ; and go for a row afterwards. Our luncheon was not so heavy as to make us indifferent to dinner, let it come when it may."

"That is delicious ; moonlight upon the water—under cover of dusk, we can approach Luff, and look upon those we love.

'She was a form of light and life,
That seen, became a part of sight ;
And rose where'er I turn'd my eye—
The morning star of memory.'"

"For heaven's sake ! no more poetry ; let us go and help Frank to cook the dinner. But what are you gazing at, Frank?"

"I see a boat, Squire."

"Is that all?"

"It is coming here."

"No ! Give me the glass ; are the ladies in it?"

"No ; not a vestige of female hat or bonnet. It is undoubtedly rowed by Her Majesty's sailors—'tis a boat from the two-funnelled government steamer."

"Are you sure they are coming here?"

"I am never sure of anything until it has happened."

Our four gentlemen forgot all about dinner, in their excitement regarding the boat.

"She has an admiral's ensign flying!"

"G-o-o-d h-e-a-v-e-n-s!" exclaimed Mr. Spooner, vehemently pulling his whiskers.

"Let us," said the squire, glowing, "go down to the landing-place, and be ready to receive him."

"Where's King Crab? Let him put on all his majesty to receive the only being on earth I envy—a British admiral."

King Crab was called, and as he emerged from his den, none of his subjects were proud of him; but he was indifferent to their opinion.

"Good gracious!" murmured Spooner, as they walked down to the landing-place, "an admiral, a British admiral—what have we got to offer him in the way of a spread, Frank?"

"There's the remains of the salt, the pepper, the mustard —"

"Gracious heavens! we dare not offer him anything."

"It would be extremely daring if we did. But here he comes—a brace of them."

"What an agitating moment, after our calm Sunday!"

"Calm Sunday! don't call it a Sunday, Spooner, but the dulllest day I ever encountered. I shall cut my throat if we pass such another."

The boat had now touched the shore; the sailors had tossed their oars, and the squire, beaming with every kindly feeling, was handing the gentlemen out of the boat, who, in the eyes of the others, appeared two unpretentious gentlemen, and nothing more.

"Allow me to introduce myself to the king of this island," said the oldest, who was little, dark, wearing spectacles, but appeared brimful of fun and jollity. Saying which, he handed his card to the squire; for though Captain Crabshawe pressed forward, his general appearance and dress were, as hinted before, by no means royal—in fact, Sam was more presentable in the character of a gentleman. As the squire read the name aloud, there was heard a murmur, and seen an expression from each, of the most unbounded astonishment and satisfaction.

"And this is my friend, Colonel Erne. We are here—at least I am—on duty. A happy chance has given me the vacant post of one who has to cruise about, every now and then, to visit the lighthouses. Not having much to do to-

day, we took a little turn in the bay, and hope we don't intrude."

Intrude ! never was word so antagonistic to their feelings. They were honoured—flattered—for ever obliged by the visit ! Had the admiral known of the serious difficulties into which they had been plunged to get rid of the time, he would have corroborated the truth of their remarks.

"We were about," said the squire, "doing the same thing. Struck by the beauty of your vessel, we meant to row round her this evening."

"It will give me great pleasure to receive you on board. We heard at Exe, where we have been to church, that some gentlemen were located here for the purpose of shooting."

"Did you see any ladies there ?" asked the squire, with a pretence at being indifferent to any answer.

"I saw ——" here the admiral paused ; he looked round—
"I saw an uncommon pretty girl."

"Elizabeth—Bessie !"

"Arabella !"

"Miss Daintree !"

"She is the prettiest girl I have ever seen," observed Colonel Erne.

"But you saw more than one?" asked the squire, now anxiously.

"Yes, there were four ladies and a little girl."

"Do they seem happy ?" asked Mr. Spooner.

"Very much so, I should say, if blooming looks are a proof of health and happiness."

"One of the ladies is my wife," said the squire.

"You are much to be envied, Sir," said the gallant admiral.

"And one of the best a man might wish to have ; she has not the heart to say 'No' when she can oblige, however much she may be put about by it."

"Fortunate for you, Sir," again answered the polite admiral.

"Ha ! ha !—so I think myself. Now, will you, Sir, honour us by taking some ——"

"Hush ! Squire ; we haven't anything," whispered Frank.

"Pooh ! there's wine."

The squire's hospitality rose in proportion to there being nothing to offer ; heartiness must make amends for destitution. But the admiral declined everything.

"No," said he ; "it is getting late. I am off to-morrow pretty betimes ; so, if I am not interrupting more important

matters, I hope you will all place yourselves under my command, and take ship with me."

In so great a hurry were they to do so, that they were all in the barge, and some way from the shore, before Frank recollected his duties as cook.

"The beef! oh! the beef!" he whispered vehemently.

"Hang the beef!" said the squire; "I will go without my dinner rather than lose the pleasure of an hour's conversation with one of England's finest sailors."

Though the admiral took no notice of this by-play, he overheard it, and got red in the face trying to control his risibility.

They were about three-quarters-of-an-hour getting to the ship, and leaped on board with the alacrity of kids. No need now to wonder how they were to pass the time; it was sure to pass all too quickly.

No Englishman can go on board one of Her Majesty's vessels without a feeling both of pride and self-satisfaction. The noble creature commands love and admiration at once, both of which are enhanced by the exulting feeling that what is the Queen's is equally the nation's; and what belongs to the nation is individually the property of each person—for each helped to create her.

Thus our five Puffites exulted and glorified over the two-funnelled yacht as if she was their own private property, built to their order, and planned from the wonderful cleverness of their own brains.

Mr. Spooner, in the exuberance of national pride and individual self-glorification, essayed to personate the manners and walk of a British tar. He scrambled up to the highest parts of the ship, and altogether poked himself in, and out, and under, and about ropes and other impediments, so that his whiskers got behind his ears, and his back hair was much rumpled.

The captain sat on a deck-stool, his legs far apart, his position uncomfortable, but his countenance bland and smiling in the extreme. Sir George, always the perfect gentleman, was fraternising with Colonel Eyre. During their discourses you might have picked up a good deal of information regarding what had been seen and said in Exe church that day.

As for Frank, he was on the quarter-deck. He had the admiral's own private telescope in hand, the one presented to him by—well, we must not say. Frank was gazing at a long misshapen little island not a mile away. Did he see the flutter of any petticoats thereon?

Meantime, the squire clings to the admiral as a limpet to a rock. The admiral is a man after his own heart. He says "yes" and "no" downright.

They had now been almost an hour on board, all loath to go back to Puff—unlimited smoking, that piece of roast beef, that "excellent convict." An odour of something toothsome permeates through the balmy evening air. The squire, sniffing it, becomes conscious of the poorness of his luncheon. He suddenly begins to think, if that piece of roast beef was before him, he could devour it, bones and all.

"I say, Frank, we must go back; Scruttles will over-roast that beef—we shall find it a cinder."

"Unfortunately, Squire, I gave strict orders it was not to go near the fire until I was there to see it done. We shall be obliged to wait, after we arrive, until it is roasted."

"Good heavens! I have a wolf in me now!"

At that identical moment the admiral, who had gone below, came on deck, and going up to the squire, said:

"It would be extremely gratifying to Erne and myself if you would kindly excuse all deficiencies and dine with us. I cannot promise you anything like a proper dinner, but, such as it is, you would oblige us greatly by helping us to discuss it."

Now an invitation to dine with two heroes, whose very nod was an honour, was in itself a gratification that the squire felt could only happen to him once in a life-time. But under the peculiar circumstances of the case, the honour was nearly swamped in the extreme seasonableness of the invitation.

As for any remembrance of the challenge, its various clauses, its penalties, its forfeits, not one of the five gentlemen seemed to have the least remembrance of its existence.

They congratulated each other heartily as they washed their hands, and made the best toilette they could. As for Frank, he capered like a boy; the squire thought of the beef with contempt. King Crab always enjoyed dining at anybody's expense rather than his own, and Spooner argued in his own mind it was of no use being an admiral unless you had champagne every day for dinner.

Sir George alone was moody. His mind kept harping on the admiration Miss Daintree had excited at church, for he had extracted sufficient from Colonel Erne to discover that this "uncommon pretty girl" was she.

Sir George enjoyed, in common with many of his sex, the feeling of desiring to have what others admired. Or, in

er words, he only hankered after a thing in proportion as he saw it estimated by others.

Captain Crabshawe had rather weakened his interest in Miss Daintree by unnecessarily thrusting her upon him as a wife. But gradually she was regaining her place in his esteem (he had no apparent affections as yet), and the unexpected praise of two strangers (whether they were heroes or not was of no consequence), elevated her so high, that he was attacked with some sharp pangs of jealousy.

Nevertheless, it was something to be able to eat a dinner which Scruttles had not only never seen, but which it was impossible he could have ever been near. Besides, the yacht would be gone to-morrow, so "to dinner with what appetite we may," said all. Just before they sat down to it, the admiral begged a gun might be loaded.

"As soon as grace is said, fire it off," ordered he, which was done. Did no misgivings even then cross the minds of any of the Puffites?

If Mr. Summers had been looking out at Luff with the admiral's own telescope, presented to him by —, why, I really believe he might have seen feminine hands waving feminine pocket-handkerchiefs. But no — simple-minded, unsuspecting creatures, they imagined nothing and thought of nothing, but that they were about to be regaled by an excellent dinner.

For it was an excellent dinner.

Ox-tail soup, soles, brill, unexceptionable lobster sauce—a splendid sirloin of beef, with the undercut intact—such a Yorkshire pudding! such a snowy mound of shredded horseradish! such a salad! one might suppose the sea was one entire kitchen garden, so profuse were the vegetables and condiments.

Delicate white fowls nestled on each side of an arched, highly decorated, resolute tongue. Four side dishes, any one of which would have been the "*pièce de resistance*" at Puff, being composed, one of larded sweetbreads, another of pork curry, a third of broiled kindeys, a fourth of "*cotelettes à la tartare*," made the hearts of our Puffites expand. This course was followed by ducklings, and a young mountain of green peas. A plum-pudding, and a variety of other sweets, making Mr. Spooner long to be a camel, who is so far superior to human beings, that it possesses two stomachs. And lots of champagne!

Under these pleasant influences, the squire, always candid, became wholly confidential, and related what would have

been their dinner had they gone home. A piece of roast beef, truly, but the undercut gone, used for cutlets; no Yorkshire pudding; no salad—a salad, indeed! they had forgotten the taste of one.

King Crab, it must be allowed, drank more champagne than was good for him, and luckily dosed off whenever there was a pause in eating. Spooner was happy as

“The Count von Strogonoff, sure he got prog enough,
The sly ould Divil, undernathe the stairs.”

Sir George forgot his jealousy; Frank was like a boy.

Nothing could exceed the amiability, the condescension, the courtesy of the admiral and his friends.

At nine o'clock the barge was reported as ready to take the gentlemen home; for the admiral said he did not wish the sailors to be later than eleven in turning into their hammocks.

Full of thanks, of gratitude, of happiness, of dinner, of champagne, the Puffites bid adieu to their kind entertainers.

“Hark ye!” cried the admiral, just as they were about to depart. “Have you not made a challenge with the ladies we met at church?”

They all exclaimed in the affirmative.

“Well, they also did us the honour of paying us a visit on board to-day, and had some luncheon. I was to tell you this from them. And, in case you thought it any infringement of the challenge, they are now square, for you have been so good as to dine with me!”

“Ha! ha! that's capital! That is the best joke I ever heard. I forgot all about the challenge, but of course it is all square. We are quits on that matter.”

“All right,” answered the admiral. “I will tell them in the morning what you say, as I am going to send a boat to Luff for cream.”

“Pray do, and give my wife my love, and tell her I should have been heartily ashamed of her if she had missed the honour you have done her, by any punctilio regarding our foolish challenge. I owed you a good deal before, Admiral, but I take it as the kindest thing of all, your showing my two Elizabeths this fine ship. So once more adieu, and good luck wherever you go!”

And so they parted.

“I hardly think it was perfectly correct Arabella trusting herself with strange gentlemen, and not having the pro-

tection of her husband's arm," murmured an aggrieved voice.

"Lord save you, man! great men are always good men. Elizabeth might go with them to the world's end, and I should not mind."

"You are always so sanguine, Squire; you credit people with goodness, knowing nothing about them."

"And I should be much ashamed of myself if I did not. I expect them to think well of me, and the least I can do is to pay them the same compliment."

"I wonder where Miss Daintree sat?"

"Just like the wimmen," growled an unsteady voice; "they are always gadding. I wouldn't be you, Squire—I wouldn't be you, Spoon—I wouldn't be ——"

The rest was lost in a snore.

EXTRACTS FROM THE JOURNAL LEFT AT PUFF.

"Just returned from a visit to the screw yacht 'Cannibal.' On board were two gentlemen—heroes, whom the world at present delight to honour; and all I can say is, that they deserve it. When I have read of all their daring—their daily facing of wounds, mutilation and death, their wonderful pluck, courage and endurance, I have been lost in admiration. Now that I have seen them face to face, my admiration has increased a hundredfold. I am proud of them as Englishmen, I love them for being good men. There is not a trace of pretension about them. Unassuming and gentlemanly, they frankly tell their tale, not so much to glorify themselves, as to relate the wonders they have seen, to those who may never witness them. I could love the admiral like a brother. One might have supposed a man lost in the ice for four years, isolated as it is the etiquette a captain should be (in a manner) from the rest of his crew, cut off from all communion with family and friends, frozen in his affections as he was frozen in the body, would have come out of that ordeal a soured and cheerless man. But, on the contrary, so genial a fellow I never met. He has the heartiest laugh, the sunniest smile, and the jolliest manner possible. And so kind as he must have been to my little Bessie! Lucky little baggage! to have an admiral, and such an admiral, to play with. During one part of this day, I was inclined to consider it the most dreary, wearisome time, I ever spent. Now I have no hesitation in saying, this day shall evermore be recorded as a white day in my

calendar. The admiral is not half my size, and to think of all he has undergone ! Colonel Erne is a fine fellow. It is curious how frank-hearted and genial sailors are. I wonder to what it is owing ?”

Another handwriting :

“ My dear Squire, æsthetically considered, the peculiar physiology of a sailor’s mind, always contemplating one train of ideas, engendered by a single focus of existence, naturally tends to make him what he is. Could we carry out this branch of the subject, and bare it home to the very root of the matter, we might, by the certain laws of reason and light, elucidate the question you propose ; and, I doubt not, satisfy ourselves fully as to the normal state of the British sailor’s peculiar idiosyncrasy. But, as in a journal of this sort, philosophical matter is much out of place, I shall confine myself to saying that the champagne was excellent. As I looked upon these two heroes, I must own to feeling, notwithstanding our pleasant position, and the excellency of the curry, a little envious. Why had nature, or rather fortune, debarred me from being either of them ? What was there in my ‘physique’ that was so far different ? I must lead an uneventful life in a bank, and never taste in the remotest way the intoxicating draught of heroism. For the life of me, I could not see why my soul, burning with ardour, vehement as their own, was left to flicker out a dull existence—unknown, unseen, unrecorded ! Such thoughts as these, doubtless, sow the seeds of discontent. I acknowledge my fault ; let me be frank. I cannot—I do not—I would never presume to emulate, to match myself with the admiral. No ; that idea is presumptuous. But the colonel—a man of my own age—my own stature—our hair much the same colour—a general resemblance—let me ask, why is he about to be knighted, and become Sir Lionel, and I remain plain Augustus Spooner ?

‘The chieftest action for a man of great spirit
Is never to be out of action.’

“ Thus said the poet, and I presume he is right. With that I must content me. The more so, because of a fair and gentle being, who shall be nameless, who has entrusted her happiness to me. When I received her vows and gave her mine, the very act debarred me from any other duty. All the ardent and burning longings for distinction—for a name—must be repressed.

‘Fame and an early death, that is the doom
Of all who greatly dare. Such as plunge
At once into renown, and give their blood
For reverence from unborn posterity.’

“This I could do, but I must not do it. Another life has a claim upon me. I am no longer answerable for myself alone. And shall I murmur at this? I will not. At the same time, I hardly know if the ladies were justified in going to church without any male protectors. Would it be well to give them a hint? ’Tis on matters of such vital importance that the heart of a husband throbs with more feeling than the brain.

“A. S.”

“Especially when that brain is decidedly under the influence of too much champagne.”

These words were written in a disguised hand.

Another now continues the Journal:—

“I do not care whether Spooner had taken too much champagne or not, but I agree with him in thinking there was a want of caution in the ladies going to church in such an out-of-the-way place as Exe, and meeting such a number of men, as they must have done. It was not right.

“Like Spooner, I refrain from mentioning names, while I say that there are certain people whose good looks excite admiration without any intention on their part. That frankness of manner, so admired by the squire as characteristic of a sailor, is sometimes much too demonstrative to be pleasant.

“Even the admiral—who, by-the-bye, is extraordinarily young for an admiral—could not withhold his admiration, and it is astonishing how quickly that sort of thing is understood. I perceive that the admiral has not a grey hair in his head; he is even more youthful in manner than in person. I should have fancied that so much hardship, being frozen for so many years, would have aged him. Not that I find fault with him for admiring a pretty girl—he is quite right to do it; but I object to people saying they are doing a thing, when all the time they are not doing it at all. It is quite against my ideas of propriety to say, ‘I am going to church to say my prayers,’ and all the time you are observing the beauty of your neighbour; and she, equally inattentive to her duties, is quite aware of, and delights in, your admiration.

"Not that I blame a girl for liking to be admired—very far from it; but I do object to a girl not being content with one admirer at a time. I respect the admiral, a man would not be a man if he did not; but I have no fancy for his friend. I don't take to 'Sirs,' which I hear he is to be made so, by being knocked on the back by a sword, and desired to rise up Sir Nobody Nothing, and in his case only for bearing being shot at better than other people. I should have regarded him as more of a hero, if he had lost a limb, or a feature. He does not even seem to have suffered in health.

"I cannot help fancying a good many people get much more than they deserve, while others don't secure what they really have a right to.

"I should no more have dared to admire her, in the way he evidently does, though he has only met her to-day, than—but I forget, this is the Journal. Let me record in it that our first week is over, and I am very glad of it. But of course, more on account of the ladies than ourselves. Allowing that we have had some disagreeables—some *contretemps* that he did not expect. They of course, must have experienced such things twofold. I propose that next Sunday we go to Exe church. We need not speak to the ladies, but, at all events, we can satisfy ourselves that they are not suffering, and we are at hand in case another crew of one of Her Majesty's ships should feel themselves called upon to take forcible possession of that out-of-the-way church.

"It may be possible that lighthouses require oil and stores, but it strikes me as very remarkable that they should stand in need of them this particular week. I feel inclined to be up early to-morrow, and waylay the admiral's boat as she returns with the cream. Who will give that cream?"

The curious writing begins:

"I know no more than you, and, what is more, I don't care. I am glad to be on good terms with the knave, but I don't think much of the Adl. He may be a wise won, but he is not my stamp of a wise won. Miss Daintrey is no dout a pritty gurl, but she nose it. I should say the Adl. was wed, and to a Tartar, and has lots of gurls. He likes the wimmen, but pore fellow, he is a sailor, and that is the reeson he knows nothing about wimmen, or he would be wizer. The dinner was good, considerin."

Another takes the pen:

"The admiral is 'wed,' and not to a Tartar—he has both

boys and girls—so his friend told me. But you monster, Crab! you are disgusted with what he said about women. It made you ashamed of yourself, I hope.

“Highly gratified by the honour of his visit, deeply grateful to him for providing us with a dinner, the only real dinner we have had for a week, ready to kiss the ground under his feet (indeed, that we all are; I must do ourselves the justice to say that we have done nothing but boast to each other of what each hero said individually to each of us), you are now, when his back is turned, upbraiding the admiral for the noblest sentence a man could utter.

“When Spooner asked him of what action in his life he was most proud, he answered,

“‘Of licking the cockpit when I was a middy.’

“‘I mean thing,’ stammered Spooner, confused by the answer.

“‘Of what thing am I most proud? If you designate her as a thing, I am most proud of an Englishwoman; for, go where you will, they are superior to all other women, in morals, habits, and appearance!’

“I could have kissed the squire, he roared his applause so loudly.

“Crab comforted himself for this heresy by not suffering the bottle of port to leave his custody as long as there was port in it.

“I was glad to see George as pleasant as the squire. As for you, Spooner, you feel suspicious that ‘the uncommon pretty girl’ is your wife. Do so, by all means; she cannot be too pretty in your eyes. When I have a wife, if ever I am so fortunate as to obtain her whom I love, I shall conceive all poetry written in her praise, and hers alone. I shall interpret all commendations as meant for her. I shall expect all eyes to dwell upon her; and I shall think it only a debt paid to her beauty and worth, to lay my life, my love, my all, at her feet.”





CHAPTER XII.

“LUFF IT IS.”

AFTER the excitement of the visit of the ‘Cannibal’ yacht into Exe bay, there can be no doubt about it that the ladies felt dull. A sort of apathy came over them.

The Journal in Mrs. Joscelyn’s handwriting admits that life was a little burdensome, for she stands convicted of making some sort of excuse.

“Excitement,” she writes, “is as necessary to some natures as the food they eat, the air they breathe. In women especially, enthusiasm and zeal kindle a flame that awakens their tenderest and most susceptible feelings. But in proportion to the amount to which they have been roused, does a certain reaction take place, unless they make use of this excitement to act upon the mind as a beneficent elixir. In which case the impressions roused into life renovate the heart, as healing medicine invigorates the frame. I am afraid we have not so applied them. If the visit of the ‘Cannibal’ had taken place towards the end of our probation, it would have been better for us. At present it seems as if nothing more exciting could occur to us—as if all other adventures must be commonplace.

“We can talk of nothing else, and think of nothing else. We remind each other of all that passed, and correct each other as to what either hero said to each of us. We have told each other over and over again what our individual feelings were on hearing the gun that announced the entrapment of our ‘Lords’ into the same scrape as ourselves.

“Truly that was a proud moment !

“Our feminine powers had proved sufficient to induce the

lion to betray the lion, or, in other words, for our sakes, weak creatures as we were, two male beings had agreed to circumvent five of their own sex. The thing was done—the gun sent a reverberating echo of triumph all through the bay!

"The next morning we awoke still flushed with excitement and happiness. The three girls, attended by Susan, went down to the landing-place with a bottle of cream, some fresh butter, hot rolls, and the last of our eggs. The admiral's boat was seen on its way. As it approached, Colonel Erne was perceived steering. Rather surprised at their long absence, I went to see what caused it.

"My little Bessie was seated in the boat. He held her as a hostage, he said—for not daring to land, he had no other means of detaining them. But a gun from the 'Cannibal' came booming over the water:

"'Ha! he told me he would do that if I lingered. That is the worst thing I know of the admiral; he is always in such a hurry! When he has done his business he will go away; now I want him to stay here a week.'

"'He wants the cream for his breakfast,' said Bessie, 'and he must have it.'

"Taking advantage of a sudden relaxing in his ward and watch over her, Bessie sprang over the side of the boat and joined us.

"'Now that is too bad—I shall come on shore!'

"'Oh! no, don't!' pleaded Kate — 'think of our challenge.'

"'I will drown myself sooner!' he answered, sinking back on his seat.

"'Good-bye,' I said, by way of hint.

"'Stop a moment. Will you let me come back? May I not come and visit you some day?'

"'Of course—we shall be only too delighted. Once more, good-bye.'

"'Stay—stay one moment—how shall I find you?'

"I gave him the direction, saying, for the third time, 'Good-bye.' As I did so, a second gun was heard.

"Off we all ran, as if pursued by a bull. Not on our account should the admiral have to wait for his friend, and the cream for his breakfast.

"No wonder we felt a little sad. Bessie could not settle to her lessons: Kate spoilt the pudding for dinner; Arabella was moping; Clara alone remained happy and gay. She had discovered, she said, while they were detained by Colonel

Erne, the seaweed called 'Porphyra Laciniata,' commonly known as Laver, and very good to eat.

"'Mrs. Joscelyn,' she said to me, after dinner, which was a dull and stupid affair, 'we must do something to rouse ourselves. If I was not afraid of its being too true, I should like to rally my little gossip on losing her heart so suddenly. I almost thought I saw tears in her eyes as the great "Cannibal" steamed out of the bay.'

"We all felt her loss, Clara; the bay looks quite forlorn without her."

"What are we to do if we begin to be dull so soon?"

"Oh! we are not dull, it is merely that sort of feeling which belongs to us women after excitement. Our nature does not permit us to do things by halves!"

"But I shall not be content with a mere victory over the gentlemen. I want to prove to them that we have been twice as happy, ten times as merry, and a hundred times as contented. In short, that we are in no hurry to return to their agreeable society."

"That is just my feeling, Clara," chimed in Mrs. Spooner. "All I pray and desire is, that they may have a lesson that will last them all their lives. When one sees gentlemen like the admiral and his friends, it is enough to disgust one with creatures like some I could name."

"Come, you are a little severe. Suppose we each begin to write down all we know of the Arctic regions. I mean all that our two new friends have told us," said Mrs. Joscelyn.

"And we will sum it all up, and read it aloud at night," exclaimed Clara.

"If that is the case, let each tell what we know to one, who shall prepare it for our critical notice."

"That one shall be you."

"No, I have neither time nor patience. Do it yourself, Clara!"

"Then be merciful to me."

"Put it into rhyme, gossip."

"Oh, ye powers, she speaks! Why, my dear sweetheart, I fancied you had lost your heart—tongue, I mean."

"That was lucky for you, otherwise you know you deserved a good scolding."

"Come, let us quarrel; it will amuse us."

"I am amused without."

"Then will you come and help me to write about the Arctic regions?"

"Oh ! no ; it makes me shudder to think of it."

"Ha !—

"She loved me for the dangers I had passed ;
And I loved her that she did pity them."

"Gossip !"

Kate ran after Clara to punish her. Clara ran for her life. Whether they really quarrelled is not known.

CLARA'S PAPER.

"In writing about the Arctic regions, I am in a manner upset at the very beginning, by being unable to realise the amount of cold that I have to describe. Moreover, it affected different people in different degrees.

"When mercury is at the freezing-point, we are to understand that it is seventy-one degrees below the freezing-point of water. In the great frosts that have occurred in England, the river Thames was frozen over, fairs were held on it, and people erected houses and lived in them. Also, not from exposure or want, people have died in England from extreme cold, and nothing else.

"But in the Arctic regions, subjected to a state of atmosphere to which this was a mere nothing, Esquimaux babies lay in their mothers' skin hoods, without covering, and did not seem to feel it. The least exposure of skin on the part of a European caused the part to be frost-bitten. When the admiral went at certain times of the moon to make astronomical observations, he did not dare to touch the instrument with his naked hand. The effect would have been the same had he clasped a red-hot iron bar. The skin would have been entirely taken off his fingers. The moisture of his breath congealed as it left his lips, and encrusted his beard and mustache with ice. The pain of thawing this was intense.

"They could not even touch a pannikin of hot tea without their mittens. In the different expeditions that were taken from time to time by sledging parties from the ships, they used to build themselves at night a snow hut, making their tent the roof ; as long as the lamp was burning, they kept pretty warm, but the intensity of the cold was sometimes so great, that the clothes they laid aside to creep into their sleeping bags would be frozen stiff by the morning.

"Food is required of the strongest and most nourishing

nature. There is a craving for it, so that even the disgusting gastronomic 'delicacies,' delighted in by the Esquimaux, did not appear to them as nauseating as might be expected ; in fact, they had great rejoicings over killing a walrus, and regaled themselves like aldermen on its oily, fishy, strong flesh ; recording, with pious thankfulness, that they obtained twelve hundred pounds of good food out of him, to say nothing of ever so many casks of delicious blubber."

("Oh ! Clara," exclaimed Bessie, "how nasty ! I will never believe that darling Sir Admiral ate blubber.")

"No, he drank it, dear, melted."

"Oh ! oh ! shocking ! I am sure you invented that."

"I allow he did not tell me so far for a fact, but he is going to give your mother the tusks, for it was a very fine walrus. They are twenty-two inches long."

"Pray go on, Clara ; I am impatient to hear more.")

"The thing that seemed to have been the worst thing to bear—in fact, he shuddered at the bare recollection—was the long night of winter.

"It seemed as if Arctic voyagers must feel that darkness which so afflicted the Egyptians, which, as you may recollect, is spoken of in the Bible as 'a darkness that might be felt.'"

"It appeared to bring on a torpor of mind as well as body. Artificial heat is known to weaken all the tissues of life, while the warmth caused by exercise invigorates and strengthens them. The sort of stagnation that came over them during this long night of nine months was harder to fight against than any dangers they encountered. All sorts of ill-humours would accumulate not only in the blood, but in the temper.

"'I believe,' said the admiral, smiling with that soft womanly smile that comes straight from a good heart, 'I really believe a man might almost quarrel with his mother in the Arctic regions.'

"In fact, bound down to the narrow limits of a ship, circumscribed in space, in a sort of visible darkness, with few amusements, and no occupation, no wonder that captious tempers and evil humours rose strong and intolerant. There was nothing genial to awaken kindly feeling, there was nothing to rouse them from torpid selfishness, but an awe of the region in which they lay, lonely, ice-bound ; a solemn vague perception that, desolate, forlorn, and isolated as they were, the almighty eyes of God regarded them.

"In most of the ships that have gone to the Arctic regions, their crews have been more or less under the influence of this irritability. Enduring a slow, lingering life together, facing

a sudden, almost inevitable annihilation from one hour to another, witnessing God's power in the mightiest and grandest forms, proclaiming 'What is man, or the son of man, that I should regard him?' isolated from all human ties, none of these things have sufficed to bind these sufferers together.

"It is recorded that one celebrated Arctic navigator, commanding an early expedition, was on such bad terms with his first lieutenant, who was his own nephew, that they did not speak to each other the whole time they were out.

"And when the latter discovered the North Pole by the inflex of the magnetic needle, he kept his secret until he returned to England, and his uncle learnt the first news of this important discovery, made by the vessel under his own command, from the public newspapers."

("Pardon me, gossip, for interrupting you. Do you think all this arose from the effects of the ice, or because they were all men and no women?")

"What say you, Mrs. Joscelyn?" asked Clara.

"Kate is mischievous. She wishes to insinuate that perhaps the Puffins are not all on speaking terms just now."

"Naughty little gossip!"

"Not at all naughty. Her idea is a perfectly just one. Captain Crabshawe has a frightful temper, Mr. Joscelyn, we know, is very hot, and I am fully aware that Augustus is dreadfully touchy."

"And all ready to start into action without any icy influence. Well, I daresay they have squabbled a little. My squire must say what he thinks, whether it be civil or not, but, as they all know him pretty well, I have every hope that they will pay no regard to anything he says. But pray go on, Clara; you have collected many more facts than I expected.")

"The admiral told me he should never forget seeing a star on the ninth of August. It was early for one to appear, and he was not looking for it.

"The Esquimaux are intelligent people, the women more so than the men, which seems caused by the fact that the women do all the work. The men certainly kill the game, but that is all; the women have to haul it home and cut it up. At these times, when they have plenty of food, the men think of nothing but gorging themselves. They eat until they cannot help themselves, when their wives come and do it for them. They stuff the amiable husband's mouth full of some delicacy, which is cut off close to the lips. When they perceive that time and exertion have caused its absorption,

they fill the mouth again, and so on, until Nature intercedes, and refuses more. Then sleep comes to the rescue.

"The Esquimaux women picked up the English language with great quickness, and one of them made a map of the coast that was surprisingly correct."

("I think it ought to be made known publicly that, at all events in the Arctic regions, the women are superior to the men.")

"I do not think that will help the women of England much, Arabella, for you may be certain the men of England will resent being placed on a par with an Esquimaux."

"I shall take care, however, to let Augustus know."

"That you can do ; it will help to remind him, that when there is a thing to be done, women are quite ready to do it, if the men decline.")

"Many and great as were their dangers, it is yet characteristic of all Arctic voyagers that they remembered God was greater. From the first beginning of Arctic voyagers in the Tudor reigns, they were as remarkable for extraordinary courage and endurance, as for the simple and child-like piety that we could not fail to notice in the hero who has just left us. On one occasion especially they had as clearly the signs before them of a certain death gradually approaching, as a man who is ascending the steps of a ladder to be hanged.

"The ship had been driven by a current that bore them along irresistibly, at the rate of six miles an hour, towards a dangerous bay, where the ice was breaking up into great floes, which were being piled up one upon another, with a power nothing could withstand. It is at these periods that there is fearful danger of a ship being nipped between two of these masses or bergs. Should the current that was propelling the ship also drive them, only the greater power of God could prevent the frail wooden home of the Arctic mariners being crushed like a nut between them. They saw before them two bergs, which never lost their position with the ship ; this showed they were being driven at the same rate. Yet such was their course, they were gradually nearing each other. Not the most ignorant sailor on board but knew the ship was racing either to deliverance or certain death.

"For more than an hour this suspense continued, until hope had vanished from the most sanguine heart. Hawsers were thrown out, boats were manned to retard their progress, all seemed in vain. One berg touched them—with frightful impetus, it drove them against the other. By the mercy of God, this swayed, rocked, heaved, and, falling over on the

other side, forced the ship, by the impetus of its plunge, safe over the fatal channel, into a fair and smooth breadth of water. But the copper covering to the bottom of the vessel hung like shreds of worsted, or was rolled up like tissue paper.

"The power of the currents in those seas must be tremendous. Bound and confined by icy manacles that are mightier than themselves for ten months of the year, they revenge themselves when freedom comes. What sport they make of the ice that was their master! They roll him up in mountainous blocks, piling up masses that would serve for ranges of hills. They form him into fantastic shapes, they split him into pillars and columns, until fancy is cheated into believing one sees the domes, the fair towers, the pinnacled turrets, and tapering steeples of a large cathedralled town. If he lies smooth and deep, as thick as the crust of the earth, as strong as adamant, still a subtle mysterious power rends him from end to end, tears him into shreds, drives him as it were to the very confines of earth. Then is this rigid, dismal, gloomy waste turned into a garden of beauty and loveliness. Verdure leaps forth as if by magic. The air has a delicious balm in it—a freshness and purity that nothing in art or nature, nothing but itself, can be likened to it. An immortal elixir, quaffed by the angels in paradise, can alone express its power and virtue. Flowers spring forth under its influence, with the hues and loveliness of an ethereal world. The living flowers, the butterflies, sport in the rosy air, coloured with gorgeous hues of the most surpassing brilliancy. Tufts of moss spring up like emerald gems, while birds flock from every quarter, filling the heretofore dead silent air with a thousand voices of happiness and life. The sun arrays himself in perpetual splendour, painting the now beautiful world with the loveliest hues, and, as if content with his work, he never withdraws night or day from the contemplation of it.

"But like the scene in a play, it seems as if this beautiful summer lasted but a few hours. It is as a dream, gone before realised—followed by a long night, where the soul has to fight with the demons of sloth and apathy.

"In imagining myself in the Arctic regions, I have reflected what means I should adopt to keep within me, pure and strong, the sweet springs of kindly affection, the energy of a warm heart, the gay spirit of a sunny nature. In a word, I tried to picture to myself how the admiral employed himself through that long night of almost solitary confinement, so as

to emerge from it animated, vivacious, happy. For the captain of a ship, by some etiquette that may not be infringed, has no companion. He is supreme, but he pays the penalty of an exalted position by being alone. Thus he dwelt in those desolate regions more solitary than the hermit in his cell, or the eagle on his crag. For the one was visited by devotees, and the other would survey the world below from his eyrie. He was not only alone, but burdened with an awful responsibility. Every order he issued bore with it almost life or death to the lives under his command. Every step he took brought him face to face with perils that might daunt the most courageous heart. Condemned by circumstances to lead a life thought by the over-merciful to be too rigorous for our worst criminals, he yet was accountable for a duty the most arduous and hazardous ever given to mortals.

"It is a life such as this that makes men turn to supernatural power. They feel their own insufficiency; they crave sympathy and encouragement. There is but one being who can give it—they turn to God. Surrounded by scenes that compel them to believe in some mighty agency—guided to life and safety by the unerring course of a star—the matchless regularity of the moon, and the simple, but unutterable laws of nature, men in the Arctic regions meet the Lord at every turn they take. They bless Him daily for daily deliverance; they praise Him hourly for unnumbered blessings, and worship Him every time they raise their eyes, for 'His wonderful works.'

"I think he of whose Arctic experience I am writing is one of those beings who, like Abraham, proved his knowledge of God by faith.

"He 'trusted that He would deliver him.'

"So God was his friend, and talked with him. God was his counsellor, comforter, brother. Over the ice, through the snow, in awful solitude, in fearful straits, in perils, in difficulties, in the sight of death, he walked with God. In that long night of darkness and inaction God beneficently communed with His servant.

"Need we wonder that, on emerging from it, a glory of hope, of happiness, of faith, shone in his eyes, and has remained there ever since."

("Your inference is excellent, Clara. The admiral gives me the idea of having so lived, that he has nothing to fear from God or man. With great simplicity of character, he adds the greater determination to do his duty. Thus he is

never overcome by the weaknesses, temptations, waywardnesses of erring human nature.")

"Your judgment must be correct, Mrs. Joscelyn, for his companion told me various anecdotes and traits of his friend, that prove your words to be true. At the same time, he seemed to imply that he told them to me in confidence, so I did not feel myself justified in writing them down. At the same time, there can be no reason why I should not relate them to you."

After Clara had done so, and they had all expressed their pleasure—

"I shall certainly erect the admiral on the topmost pinnacle of my favour. Evermore he shall be the hero I shall worship," quoth Kate.

"Gossip, you are in the right on't. Regarded as a man who turned from the path of fame, to follow that of duty, you could not crown a more worthy hero."

"I know nothing about Arctic affairs," pleaded Mrs. Spooner. "What did he go for?—and whose were the missing ships?"

Such an amount of ignorance startled our ladies into exclamations of such vehemence, Mrs. Spooner was offended.

"I am not like some people, always reading the newspapers to find out shocking things—wife-beatings, and murders, and suicides, and poisonings, and all that. I read what Augustus calls the 'hatch, match, and dispatch' column, and also the fashions; and perhaps a divorce case, if it is not very bad. But I think women have no business to meddle with politics and public affairs."

"But even I know about the good Sir John Franklin, who went for the honour of his country, to discover the north-west passage, and that he died at his post of duty, on the 11th of June, 1847, and never came home to see his poor wife and children."

"That is all very well, Bessie; some people may know one thing and some another. Now, I have no more idea of how much cold they endured, than I had before Clara explained it—how can I tell what mercury feels?"

"Let me explain it in this way. They have had such intense cold, that the thermometer has been known to be seventy-five degrees below zero."

"Who is zero?"

There was a laugh.

Alas! that human nature can least bear to be laughed at.

"And," as Mrs. Joscelyn said, "just as they were all so

moved and interested in Clara's reading, their hearts all soft and tender!" The sudden change was like the return of night, after the beautiful Arctic summer.

The truth must be told. The ladies came to words, there was a quarrel, there were tears, there was a burst of passionate invectives.

During this outburst, Mrs. Spooner announced for certain, what had been before only suspected, that she had never been properly educated. In other words, she was not only an ignorant person, but rather delighted in being ignorant, that is, if one might judge by the little pains she took to make herself any better. But to be laughed at for it was quite a different affair.

"Laughed at, indeed! by a girl who had gone about the world in rags, and had for her relations people who were not gentlefolks! She, Mrs. Spooner, was very different. It is true that her health had been too delicate to permit of sending her to school, but she had always lived with people who had dinner napkins every day, and who would not go in an omnibus to save their lives."

"If one is estimated," retaliated the haughty Clara, "according to such tests, I rejoice in my rags, and am proud of my relatives."

"And so do I for you," echoed an indignant little gossip, flushed with ardour for the fight in defence of her beloved Clara.

It is a certain fact that the quarrels of the female sex are generally of such a sort, the less said about them the better.

Loving the ladies heartily, as it is our duty to do, I think it best not to write down the recriminations, the upbraidings, the sobbings, the wills and the won'ts, the snips and the snaps, and all the other little items that make up a female quarrel.

It sufficed that in half-an-hour Mrs. Joscelyn sat alone in the saloon of her palace.

Bessie had been sent to bed at the first onset, though, the combatants being all-anxious to make themselves heard, of course she might just as well have stayed, for their voices penetrated even into the kitchen.

Clara had walked off in stately dudgeon, but she suffered more from wounded vanity than from the words of Mrs. Spooner; she had taken such pains with her Arctic paper—she had been anticipating, as is natural in a young author, a meed of praise—she had even looked forward to a "second

edition"—which means, second reading of her essay—and now behold ! Probably, to keep the peace, she must never more mention its existence. To avoid a quarrel, she must be as careful as in the very Arctic regions themselves. She had loved the subject on which she had written. Her fine enthusiastic nature made her understand the life of the Arctic voyagers, and, in understanding, she had identified herself with it. Thus she may be pardoned if her heart in the matter suffered from the rude shock caused by an unseemly quarrel. The vanity of authors is (alas ! poor souls) a part of their being.

There is the love of mothers for their offspring, of a wife for her husband, of the lover for his beloved, but none of these equals the adoration of an author for the child, the wife, the love of his brain. He knows it can have no other parent ; he is the only spouse, no lover can claim a prior right, he is the sole being responsible for its beauties or its faults. Without being vain, but with a tender, parental, fond care over his work, all the more because it is an orphan without him, he watches over, guards, loves, and protects his literary offspring ; he mourns over it, as over a dead child, if unsuccessful ; he rejoices and is jubilant if a modicum of praise is accorded to it. Poor authors ! few but themselves know the throes, the heart-burnings, the pangs, the fears that assail them when they send forth, into a criticising and unfeeling world, the child which has been delivered from their brain with such infinite care and labour !

But to return to Clara. She had a fine mind, she felt the indignity of having her lofty thoughts thrust aside for such folly—yes, such folly ! She was angry with herself for answering Mrs. Spooner's little spits of wrath. She could not forgive herself, so she stalked off to bed, her nose in the air, her back like a ramrod. And the dear, little, wilful rosebud, all a-glowing with indignation and dripping with tears, went with her.

Mrs. Spooner was hysterical.

"I—I w—will g—go to Au—Augustus to-morrow ! He—he will t—take c—care I—I—I am not insul—sult—sulted !"

Thus she sobbed, and also went to bed.

The fact of the matter was that they had all said a great deal more than they intended.

As Mrs. Joscelyn sat perplexed and alone, she naturally thought a good deal of her own position.

Having vaunted once or twice openly, and a great deal more than that, privately, to herself, that they should cer-

tainly win the challenge, she reckoned that it would be more her fault than that of her companions if they did not do so. She was quite alive to her own powers of entertaining and endurance ; she had meant to devote herself to her companions, and she was so far perfectly correct in thinking that few were more fitted for such a task than herself.

She had every confidence in her own powers. But here was a state of things that had nothing to do with her at all—that arose out of the merest accident, and, from a beginning of nothing, threatened to annihilate every hope she had, and sweep away from under their very feet every hope of winning.

She was a just woman, and began her cogitations to herself by acknowledging that she deserved a rebuff. Having atoned to her conscience, she began to cast about in her mind how she could smooth matters ; in what way she could so beguile her companions, that they might meet in the morning with some show of peace and forgiveness.

There was Clara. Mrs. Joscelyn shook her head to herself as she thought over the probability of making Clara put forth the first show of penitence.

Clara was one of those good creatures who cannot compromise in any way. If she thought Mrs. Spooner had been in the wrong, nothing would persuade her even to mollify that fact. She would, in her magnanimous fashion, say,

“Of course I forgive and will forget everything, but you were in the wrong.”

Now, with regard to the amiable A. S., there was no doubt about it, if ever so wrong, she must be treated as if the injured party—she must be “soothered” over. This must be accorded her, because she is one of those whom Solomon describes as unanswerable.

“She was a silly woman, but,” as Mrs. Joscelyn acknowledged to herself, “it is more difficult to manage a fool than a wise woman. Suppose I did the disagreeable work of flattering her into good-humour, all my efforts will be useless. Clara alone can administer the balm that will allay her irritation. I must say it is very provoking, and I heartily wish I had never trusted our characters, our chance of winning, in her hands. It is against my principles to persuade Clara to act a part, or say what she does not think, therefore I fear I must give the matter up. If a grain of sense returns to Arabella before the morning, we may weather this storm yet ; but if not, then we lose the challenge, and for a quarrel that is only less silly, because it is more provoking.”

Mrs. Joscelyn took care to be up early ; in fact, though the last to go to bed, she was the first to make her appearance.

Kate came down with her rosy lips pursed, her dainty little head bearing itself airily high, her hands pertly seated in the pockets of her apron, and her heels almost two inches from the ground.

"Good-morning, aunt," says she, with an assurance that foreboded awful things from Clara, and poking her face towards her aunt to be kissed.

"I do not kiss noses," said Mrs. Joscelyn, gravely.

"I beg your pardon, auntie," murmured the little thing, immediately meek as a mouse ; and withdrawing her hands from her pockets, she put up her mouth beseechingly.

"Now, Kate, I desire you to be forbearing and good ; for if you don't help me, Arabella will go home, send for her husband, and we shall lose the challenge."

"I won't have my gossip insulted. I will lose the challenge rather than that !"

"Oh ! very well ; since such is your decision, go off and milk your cow, and don't let me see you again for an hour."

"Very well, auntie," and the little maiden departed with a demure smile on her face, and the kitten on her shoulder.

All the challenges in the world might be lost before she would be untrue to her first love. For it very often happens that the first phase of that charming feeling in a young girl's heart, begins by a devoted and magnanimous adoration of one of her own sex. Too timid, or too innocent, to permit the budding feeling to expend itself upon a man, she has no scruple in pouring out all the wealth of her heart upon another girl ; and how warm, spontaneous, true, is that sweet love !

Mrs. Joscelyn loved her little petulant Kate more than ever, though she had lost her as an ally.

Arabella appeared next upon the scene of action ; she was jerky in manner, restless in mood, and altogether seemed in that nervous state that portended a fit of crying. But she kissed Mrs. Joscelyn affectionately, she kissed Bessie with ardour, and she ran to meet Kate, laden with things for breakfast, all eagerness—kissing her with great fervour, notwithstanding that Kate looked at her out of her great large eyes with a sort of amused astonishment.

"Now," thought Mrs. Joscelyn to herself, "I can see that Arabella is rather ashamed of herself, and wants to make it

up. All depends upon Clara. The Heavens permit that she may be at least forbearing—here she comes !”

Enter Clara with a run and a spring, as if she had been Kate or Bessie.

“Gracious goodness ! to think of my being so late ! Good-morning, Mamma Joscelyn—good-morning, dear Mrs. Spooner—good-morning, Bessie. Now see what I am going to do—I am going to burn this horrid thing that caused us all to quarrel last night,” and pop upon the fire went the Arctic MS.

“Oh ! oh !” exclaimed Mrs. Joscelyn.

“Oh ! oh !” screamed Mrs. Spooner.

“Oh ! oh ! oh !” shrieked the little gossip.

Heedless creature ; she rushes forward, she snatches the Arctic MS. out of the fire, she rolls it in her apron to extinguish the flames, she forgets her apron is only made of muslin. There is a flare, a sudden great flame, a fizzing, a scream, a scuffle.

Mrs. Joscelyn has pulled the pretty thing down on to the floor, and enveloped her in a great shawl. In one minute was she in danger and out of it.

“See !” she exclaims, as they helped her up safe, but not unscorched ; “I have it safe ;” and she holds up the MS., scarcely injured. She has defined in her sweet girl-love the treasure it was to her gossip, and does not seem to care for the danger from which she has been so mercifully preserved, so that it is safe.

Now Mrs. Spooner has a right to cry, but it is for joy, that the darling girl is safe. Clara is pale with anguish and fright, and kisses the little rash thing in agony.

Mrs. Joscelyn applies a little cream to the pretty ear slightly scorched, and the corner of an eyebrow.

Ah ! Kate, when you next behold yourself in the glass, will you think Clara’s MS. worth the loss of a curl of hair, half an eyebrow, and the whole fringe of lashes from one eye ? We believe she cares nothing for them in comparison.

“My child,” observes Mrs. Joscelyn tenderly, “you have had a narrow escape—you are fairly scorched all down this side.”

“I thought there was a great smell of roast meat.”

But Mrs. Joscelyn reproves her for levity, and calling Susan, opens the prayer-book for their morning prayers. She is deeply moved, her voice falters, the tears are running down her cheeks as she thank God for a great deliverance.

They know she is not easily moved to tears ; they feel as she feels ; a deep awe of gratitude fills their hearts ; they rise from their knees subdued and trembling, but most loving to each other.

So thus ended that famous quarrel.

Nothing more was ever heard of it, not even when Clara was requested to read her MS. once more, thus realising her hopes.

"You have a knack of writing, Clara ; suppose you compose a story for our amusement."

"I will try ; but meantime, my gossip and I were talking about different historical characters that we admired, and we thought it would be rather amusing to act and speak, as we think they would have acted and spoken."

"I think the idea novel. Do you mean us to select your characters, or will you do it yourselves ?"

"We will choose the first set, because we shall wish to make the experiment by ourselves at first."

"Shall we have one to-night ?"

"We will try. It depends upon my little gossip's burns."

"Oh ! they are mending fast, and if I never get any more eyelashes on this eye, people can easily see by the other that I had some once. Then when they hear the tale I shall be quite a little heroine."

"Quite a little goose," responded her aunt ; "I have not recovered the shock yet. It is strange that you are more giddy than ever, child, instead of being subdued."

"I am upheld, auntie, by the consciousness of having saved that valuable ——"

"Will you dare to mock me, unkind gossip ; as if the most valuable MS. in creation was equal to your life."

"Upon my word, you flatter me ; Milton's *Paradise Lost*, or one of Shakespeare's ——"

"Hush ! my dear children ; I cannot bear any flippancy regarding that terrible moment."

"I wish," said Bessie, hearing a falter in her mother's voice, "that you girls would act something out of the '*Ara-bian Nights*.' Now, do try the story of the '*Singing Tree*,' the '*Talking Bird*,' and the '*Golden Water* !'"

"And where are we to obtain those wonderful things, Miss Bessie ?"

"Mamma told me I was to interpret the story allegorically. Don't you think you can help me ?"

"Well, sit down, and let us try. Here we are, seated

under the shade of the largest tree in the island, by way of helping us to solve the riddle. Listen, Bessie ; don't you hear it singing ?”

“I hear the wind rustling through the upper branches, yet there is no breath of air down here to stir my hair.”

“Then the tree is singing. This is Nature's music ; and there comes on the soft wings of the wind a low chorus murmured by the sea ; together, they fill the air with a soft pleasant sound.”

“So they do ! And after all, I am as fortunate as the princess ; I can have a singing tree, wherever there is a tree.”

“Very true, Bessie. It is useless to long and cry for what we have not got ; it is best to go and seek for it, or for something like it.”

“But the talking bird, mamma—I am sure Clara can never show me how to obtain such a wise creature.”

“Why, Bessie, can you make nests like the birds ?—can you poise yourself on agile wings and fly through the air as they do ? They can do what you cannot, and, hark ! how they talk to each other !—‘Twit ! twit !’ says the little cock sparrow ; and if you watch you will see that, as soon as he says this, down comes his wife, down come all the children, and they all begin to eat. Papa Sparrow looks out, he sees some one coming ! ‘Twee ! twee ! twit !’ and away they all go like little myths. You may watch the birds all day, and always discover something wise and curious about them. And no wonder, because God was their teacher.”

“Allegorically considered,” answered Bessie, sententiously. “I will allow that will do for the talking-bird. At all events, I had better be contented with your view of the matter, as I am not likely to have any other. And how about the golden water, the least drop of which, cast anywhere, increases into a great fountain ?”

“Ah ! Bessie,” answered Clara, “can you not find for the golden water the most beautiful of all similes ? The least drop, as you say, poured anywhere, increases to the utmost volume, might fill all space, yet never overflows to destruction. This is the water of baptism, or the spring of religion. Pour the merest drop into the heart, and it fills it with a fountain of living waters. Only sin, evil, and perverseness can dry it up ; and even then it has but to be cleared of one pebble, when it will burst forth again, pure, fresh, and sweet as ever. The golden water is near at hand to us all ; we

have but to stretch out a hand, to open the mouth, and we are blessed with it!"

"I like that," murmured Bessie, with a glow in her eyes; "the allegory of the golden water is the most beautiful of all. Thank you, dear Clara; how happy the world seems to me, now that I perceive I may go out into it, and meet everywhere the singing tree, and the talking bird, but, above all things, that I have the golden water in my heart! I will try, mamma, never to let the spring be dried up through any sin or naughtiness. It shall always be flowing and bright."

"Please God, Bessie," suggested her mother.

"Yes, please God," answered Bessie fervently.

This kind of conversation did not come amiss to the ladies, who were still under the influence of Kate's narrow escape.

The boat from Deep-Cliffs had come and gone with their different matters. There had been no excitement about its arrival, and there were no orders for its return before that day week, which would be a Tuesday.

It had been settled that the gentlemen should have their fresh stores and linen on Mondays, and the ladies on Tuesdays, because it was inconvenient to visit both islands the same day.

As Susan brought away the last package from the boat, Mrs. Joscelyn perceived an unusual visitant on her face, namely, a smile.

"What has happened, Susan?"

"They be uncommon dull at Puff, Mum."

"How do you know that?"

"The boatmen, Mum, says as how master have ordered 'em to come twice a-week, instid of onny once. And they wor a-asking me, Mum, if we was a-wanting 'em to come a bit oftener 'wesels."

"What did you answer, Susan?"

"I tuk the liberty o' sayin, Mum, 'No,' I says, 'we ain't awantin' noffin, much obleeged, and if so bees as the meat 'ud keep sweet, we shouldn't be a-wantin' on ye at all,' I says; because, Mum, I'd do the washin', I 'ood, and I'd larn the ladies hironing!"

"Susan, did you happen to ask the boatmen if Mr. Spooner was well—quite well?"

"I didn't fur to go fur to hax how he were in especial, Mum, but I tuk the liberty of 'opin master and his friends 'ad their 'elth, Mum."

"And what—what was the answer, Susan?"

"They be all uncommen well in their 'elths, Mum, but they doesn't seem so well in their minds, Mum."

"Good heavens! suppose Augustus is fretting?"

"I hope he is, Arabella, for your sake; but do not let us ask any more questions of Susan—I hardly think it is fair."

"But surely they have lost the challenge sending for the boat three times a-week?"

"We are not supposed to know that; I fancy they will be honourable enough to tell us."

"You are far too forbearing, Mrs. Joscelyn."

"I never found that the indulgence of this feeling ever brought me an ill turn. On the contrary, it has done me so much good service, I am not tired of practising it."

"But suppose they don't tell us—will not you?"

"No, I think not—all the more because from their habits they ought properly to have the boat oftener than ourselves. They want their newspapers, and though gossip is supposed to be our peculiar vocation and delight, commend me to a party of gentlemen to obtain it in perfection. They cannot live without it."

Clara and Kate having given notice that they were ready with a scene for that evening's entertainment, great excitement ensued.

It was politely intimated to Susan that she might attend if she liked, to which she graciously replied,

"That she warn't quite sure but that she might find a bit o' time to fool away."

Mrs. Spooner, having made various inquiries as to the quality of the guests she was about to see personated—whether they were kings and queens, lords and ladies, milkmaids and clowns—came rustling down to tea in her best silk, in honour of the Earl and Countess of Nythsdale, for such was the rank of the *dramatis persona*.

"The Earl of Nythsdale," related Clara, "being attainted of high treason by King George I. and thrown into the tower with the Earl of Derwentwater and many other friends, was expecting the fulfilment of his sentence almost every day. The punishment for high treason was beheading, with other frightful customs that I need not mention. The wives and noble relations of the attainted lords had made every exertion for a remittance of the sentence. The king was about to shed the richest blood of his realm, but neither that nor their submission, nor any future promise, nor any compromise, was entertained by the king. He forgot the chief quality of his position, namely, mercy. Thus the Countess of Nythsdale

was about to visit her lord, perhaps for the last time. It is this final scene in the prison between them that we are to try and portray for your pleasure."

This prologue having been spoken, the two girls retired behind a screen.

Presently a cavalier, with a dark blue riding-cloak thrown over one shoulder, with a black velvet hat on his head, adorned with a long drooping feather, was seen seated at a table, one hand concealing his face. He had scarcely been the object of their attention two minutes, when a rustle of silken garments was heard, and immediately appeared, with hair drawn back from her face, a black hood on her head, a lovely little Lady Nythsdale. She throws one arm round the earl's neck, and half kneels before him.

The Earl (personated by Clara).—"Sweet wife, you are here once more. I have counted the moments of your absence."

The Countess (personated by Kate).—"Oh ! my good lord, fear for thy precious life alone detained me."

The Earl.—"But now thou must think no more on't, Winifred. The last hope is gone. The cruel discourtesy of His Majesty to my gentle wife hath well-nigh unmanned me. I pined to see her sweet face, and kiss those pleading, sorely-treated hands."

The Countess.—"Think no more of it, my dearest lord ; thou would'st rather hold me thus, the cast-down and rudely trampled-on wife, than a dainty lady that had no soul to brave a royal frown. But I thought shame to tell thee, husband, of that scene, for it redounded not to His Majesty's good name—of whom God forbid that I should speak disloyally. Nathless as you know the truth—that indeed from the entrance door of the royal chamber, on the threshold of which a pleading wife bent her knees, and humbly prayed her husband's life, I was dragged across the room from end to end, for neither would I forego my urgent prayer, and neither would His Majesty yield me thy pardon. Thus, my most dear lord, I, who, for thee, would kiss the sword that took my life for thine, have, by my vehemence and mighty passion, but hurt your cause. His Majesty did command, before his grooms and pages, and other menials, besides the lords in waiting, and his chief courtiers, that 'yon frantic woman' (truly it may be so) 'should not again be let into his presence.' Dost hear, my lord, thy wife, thy countess, is forbidden the palace ?"

The Earl.—"Ay, Winifred, I hear ; but I sorrow not for that which you deplore—(and the rather because I built me no

hope thereon) ; but that my gentle countess should have had such ungentle usage—she who blushed at her husband's notice, who lingered bashful behind her peers, who drooped like the violet in garish company—to be thus maltreated by the royal hand, to be hurried from the presence as a thing unseemly to the royal sight ; in truth, wife, it becomes not a man about to meet his Maker to think on the matter.”

The Countess.—“Think thus and so much, my lord, that thou art with justice incensed against His Majesty. He hath forgotten the kingly nature of a king, and it is therefore with more reason thou wilt list to other deliverance than at his hand. A prince that is so ungentle to a woman, so discourteous to a lady, so disloyal to a wife, methinks deserves not that a noble heart should kiss the hand of such a king, and say, ‘Tis well.’ The nobles of this land inherit with their blood the high privilege to hold their lives in hostage for their king, but he must be a noble prince.”

The Earl.—“Sweet Winifred, stun me no more with words, wherein I scent a secret purpose. Unbosom thyself, and seek not to blind my reason with thy wife-like arts.”

The Countess.—“Thou divinest truly, my lord ; and dost thou not also see that mine eye hath a light and happiness in it—long, long banished until now. All is prepared. It was that which kept me from thy side, my dear lord. All is prepared—we wait—I wait—but—but for thy consent.”

The Earl.—“Ah ! wife, in that hesitation I read thou fearest to gain that consent. A flushing, changing cheek, downcast eyes, a faltering voice, bid me prepare to hear that my noble Winifred has forgotten her duty in her love ; she will counsel an escape that will not beseem my honour.”

The Countess.—“And is life so vain a thing that my lord may cast it down as worthless !”

The Earl.—“It would be so, Winifred, stained by an unworthy action.”

The Countess.—“Is it unworthy to save thy noble name from the taint of high treason ? Let thy head, thy precious head, lie on the block at command of thy king, and if severed from thy body, evermore through future generations will history babble forth, the Earl of Nythsdale died upon the block a traitor ! Who can undo the fact ? And His Majesty—upon his soul will rest the guilt of shedding innocent, most innocent blood.”

The Earl.—“Cease, Winifred, cease ; thine arguments smack of man's subtle wisdom, and come not well from thy pure gentle lips.”

The Countess.—"Then listen, husband, to a woman's plea, a wife, a mother. Thou knowest that without thee I am less than nothing!"

The Earl.—"Nay, thou hast a shrewd wit, and a discretion beyond most women."

The Countess.—"For thee, my lord, I call forth my best parts. So dear is thy love to me, so needful thy praise, I would be all things to please you. But oh! my most dear lord, bethink you what I should be without thee. See me in thy mind's eye returning to our home, where I was so blest in thy company, alone, sorrowing, worse than widowed, violence having torn from me my heart—for thou art my heart! And as I raise, with infinite dolour and anguish, my sad eyes, there runneth to meet me our little prattlers, thine and mine. And they, most innocent, beseech of me news of him they most love and honour, when they shall see him? The time hath been so long since they did kiss his dear hand, and clomb up to stroke, with reverent loving little fingers, his fair curling beard, the which groweth to them so wondrously on the chin. And then, what shall I say? Good, my lord, what words am I to use to tell thy children that their father, honoured and beloved, hath been attainted for high treason; that he was imprisoned in the Tower; that the king hath had his head, that dear head with the fair curly beard, struck from his shoulders; that it hath been held aloft in sight of all the world, blasted with the words—"Behold the head of a traitor!"

The Earl.—"My Winifred, cease! I—thou—oh!—wife—wife—wife!"

The Countess.—"And then our boy—will he not, noble and gallant, as ever boy of tender years may be—will he not strike his mother on the lips as she speaks the horrid words?"

The Earl.—"Wife—Winifred, hear me! Our boy hath so much of his mother's nature in him, he will never utter the word traitor and his father's name together. He is full young, but he is of full age in gallant bearing. The pretty noble fellow! I see him now, prattling so boldly of the knightly deeds he would achieve for the honour of his fair sisters. At least, Winifred, you will tell him I died the death my king commanded."

The Countess.—"Not from me, oh! not from me will he hear aught. I am not stone—this heart is not adamant. It is breaking now, thank God! It is a foolish, gentle, tender heart—it can die, but it cannot suffer. Rude untutored lips will tell our children that their father was beheaded for dis-

loyalty to his king, and that their mother died for shame of living his widow."

The Earl.—"Fie on thee, Winifred ! There is a passion in thine eyes unseemly to me. We have but a few hours to be together, my wife. Here, rest thee on my heart, and calm this wild sobbing. Thou knowest thou must live for our children."

The Countess.—"I will not, because I cannot !"

The Earl.—"Nay, nay, sweetheart. Now, hear me patiently ; would'st thou counsel me to desert my good Lord Derwentwater, and those attainted with us ? We cast our fortunes together -- we, the straight-locked friends of happier days. It hath happed that we are in evil case, it may be for the good of the realm that example should be made. But as in weal, so in woe, we are fellows. I must abide by my friends, Winifred."

The Countess.—"Then thou lovest them better than thine own blood."

The Earl.—"No, wife—mine honour only comes betwixt thee and me."

The Countess.—"Then bid honour be father and mother to thy babes ; they will have none else."

The Earl.—"They could have none better."

The Countess.—"Oh ! my good lord, hear me but once more. It shall be on my knees, for so do I pray to my God in Heaven, who hath merciful, wide-open ears, and answereth even before one speaketh, and I have now to beseech one who hath no pity upon those who look to him for all joy. When he made me his wife, he did swear that, forsaking all other, he would cleave only to me ; and when God gave him children, he thanked Him, as having gifts from the Lord, for whose souls he was answerable. Yet doth honour come and say we are nothing—honour is before all ! Well, be it so—I and my children will let this honour take the place that hath hitherto been ours only. But bethink thee, honour, if thou wilt gain much. There is a waywardness in the humours of the king that leads him to sport with life, as if it were a toy for him to give and take. And through this temper I and mine, and the noble name we bear, are to perish, as weeds are destroyed by the wayside ; we are sacrificed for a prince who hath not mannerly words for a distracted wife."

The Earl.—"Winifred !"

The Countess.—"Who recklessly smites down in fretful mood a noble life, and removes from the young and unprotected their lord and protector. A prince powerful for

evil, but impotent for noble clemency. A prince who will not think death settleth the score between him and his victim, but will delight, as pastime, to scare and fright the widow and orphans."

The Earl.—"Wife!"

The Countess.—"Hunting us with such sad and ill-usage, that the cry of us will pierce heaven, and reach his ears, who so readily laid his head on the block at that prince's command."

The Earl.—"Go, Winifred—thou hast conquered. God forgive me mine infirmity."

The Countess.—"And God, my God! receive my thanks!"

The Earl (catching her as she falls fainting).—"Sweetheart, my wife! Winifred! The joy hath killed her. She sobs—she breathes. If I err, oh my God, in swerving from the path mine honour had marked out for me, I beseech Thee to assail me, for the sake of her Thou gavest me to love and cherish."

Finis.

Mrs. Spooner (crying heartily).—"Oh! my dear girls, I never could have forgiven you, had the earl stood out. The most touching thing I ever heard! And did he escape?—and how was it done? Poor dear, darling wife! I must have beaten him had he not relented!"

Mrs. Foscelyn.—"I think that was an excellent idea of Kate's to faint. An intense overpowering joy loses its effect if portrayed; because it is almost impossible to keep it within sufficiently rational bounds so as not to border on the ludicrous. So with a great grief, which is so sublime endured in silence, so painful in all its phases if outspoken."

Clara.—"There is this to be said of joy, that it is generally born in a moment, it flashes like a meteor in the darkest hours; while the eyes are full of tears, it blinds them with the splendour of its radiance, so that naturally the frame faints with the sudden ecstasy of relief."

Mrs. Foscelyn.—"Very true. Let me compliment you on the due appreciation you have shown of two such noble characters, each so different of their kind."

Bessie.—"Do—do let us have some more, it was so short!"

Kate.—"We have another nearly ready, but we shall require your help, Bessie."

Bessie.—"Oh! how delightful! I hope it is Cinderella, and that I am to have a real godmother."

Kate.—"Ah! ah! Bessie; you want a coach, do you?—footmen and horses, to drive round the island? But if your godmother comes, I wish you would ask her to furnish us with some dresses. It is inconceivable the trouble we had to improvise the earl's dress, when there was not a male garment on the island."

Mrs. Joscelyn.—"You did very well; now, what is your next scene?"

Clara.—"Fancy the ridiculousness of my little gossip. She wanted to act something so wholly different from the Earl and Countess of Nythsdale, that she chose Socrates and Xantippe."

Mrs. Spooner's eyes asking (what her tongue prudently forbore) the history of these two worthies, Clara went on just as if she had always intended to say it, with—

"He, you know, so wise, so learned, so honoured a sage in ancient history, who was supposed to have lived in the time of Ezra the prophet, or Artaxerxes the King; and she, the greatest scold ever known, from then until now; whose temper has dignified her with a proverb. But as I said to Kate, considering the character of Socrates, it would be but justice to it to keep him wholly silent."

"And then," interrupted Kate, "we did not know how people scolded in ancient days; though I dare say Socrates was provoking at times, spite of all his wisdom. I have known one or two very wise people; one was Mr. Fresnot, and he was never in time for anything ——"

"And oh! I know one," interrupted Mrs. Spooner, quite joyful at being able to have a little fling at learning; "Mrs. Homespin, who never had a worse name, for she is never at home; and not only cannot spin, but is unable to sew. She despises work; her house is all over ink, and she never attends to a single thing in it. Her poor husband—however, he has taken to drinking ——"

"What is your next entertainment?" interrupted Mrs. Joscelyn, who knew the penalty of giving Mrs. Spooner a license to lash her neighbours.

Clara.—"The Exiles of Siberia.' You are to suppose that Elizabeth has already entreated her parents to permit her to take her memorable journey, and that they have refused. She is suffering in consequence, so that her father and mother are secretly anxious about her. I am to be Stanislaus; Bessie, on a high chair, elaborately got up for the occasion, will be Queen; and Kate is to be the heroine herself."

"Bessie, I presume, has not much to say."

"Oh ! mamma, why ? I feel brimful of 'says.'"

"You shall not be silent, I promise you, Bessie. Now, please to allow us ten minutes for preparation."

When the screen was drawn aside, the appearance of the Queen, knowing who represented her, was really startling. To suppose that the round, rosy-faced Bessie had been changed into a dignified, pale, mourning Queen, was almost too much for Mrs. Joscelyn's risible faculties, much as she desired to be grave. It ought to be recorded of the newly-made Queen, that she abated not one jot of her dignity and reserve, though she overheard the exclamations of the audience.

Stanislaus leant against and behind her chair, which was a convenient situation, as the petticoats he was obliged to wear could not be seen.

Stanislaus.—"Have you seen our child ?"

The Queen.—"But a moment, Stanislaus—she shuns our sight."

Stanislaus.—"It is that we may not see her weep."

The Queen.—"She comes ; I hear her step on the snow, so light, yet without the spring, the elasticity of youth."

(*Enter Elizabeth slowly, her eyes cast down. Seeing her father, she starts, and kneels at his feet as if for his blessing.*)

Stanislaus.—"Daughter, you have been weeping."

Elizabeth.—"Father, my heart is heavy ; I am weary."

Stanislaus.—"Child, you mourn secretly. Is it so great a trial to be bidden not to leave your father and mother ?"

Elizabeth.—"That is my only consolation."

Stanislaus.—"Yet, day by day, you grow more sad."

Elizabeth.—"It is sad to have no purpose for which to live."

Stanislaus.—"Is it not enough that thou art the light, the sunshine of our hearts ?"

Elizabeth.—"Yes, I feel it so much, that I would repay the debt. My father gave me life, I would give him what is the worth of life—freedom."

Stanislaus.—"You give us happiness. Be content. Alas ! for freedom ! Is thy nature God-like, that thou canst give what to mortals is impossible ?"

Elizabeth.—"To a child God gives His nature. Man deprived thee of freedom ; what man has dared to do, I, thy child and God's, would dare to undo !"

Stanislaus.—"Should you fail ?"

Elizabeth.—"Fail ! why fail ? For what purpose was I

born: Only to bloom like the flowers who bend forward to greet the hand that caresses them, and, being plucked, die happy that they have fulfilled their destiny? I should die so if I might fulfil mine."

Stanislaus.—"And your mother and I left tasting sorrow now in its bitterest cup, because we have lost that for which alone we cared to live."

Elizabeth.—"But I shall succeed, father."

Stanislaus.—"Oh! Elizabeth, matchless is thy love; but you have gazed, my daughter, into the realms of fancy, until thy judgment is clouded. Hear thy mother, it may be she can touch some sympathetic chord in thy heart, by which thou mayest see thy way to the realities of our life."

Elizabeth.—"Mother, I listen."

The Queen.—(faltering).—"I am a woman. Oh! Stanislaus, I can endure. Our Elizabeth assumes to me a divine aspect when I see her—absent, I remember I am her mother, and fear."

Stanislaus.—"In other words, your heart responds to her heart—you encourage secretly her project."

The Queen.—"Ah, husband, if she should succeed, you will be free! Happy thought! ask me not to protest against a deed so holy."

Stanislaus.—"Hear me. Dost thou not perceive that to free the husband thou sacrificest the child? What! silent! What! no shudder? Our only child, our sole possession, our one blessing; bereft of all others, but that thou and I art together. Shall she be sacrificed for the vain hope of giving a few days' freedom to a worn-out dying prisoner?"

The Queen.—"Stanislaus, she dies either way. I am her mother. I shall mourn for my child less if she fall a victim to her filial devotion, than if she droops here into a grave of disappointed hope!"

Stanislaus.—"Thou hast lost thy woman's nature, and rememberest only that thou wast a queen."

The Queen.—"I remember that I am thy wife, and that I bore thee a child, whom the great God has elected as an example to all ages of filial devotion. My Elizabeth will be immortalised."

Stanislaus (rising and holding up both hands).—"Daughter, take my blessing, and the blessing of God Almighty be with you. Go!"

(*Elizabeth kneels at her father's feet and kisses his hands.*)

"Very well done, Bessie," said Mrs. Joscelyn, "I am quite proud of you!"

"Oh!" blushed Bessie, "Clara wrote out what I was to say."

"Well, it was very pretty, I must say, though I don't think I was ~~so~~ much moved as with the first one. Really, how clever they are, Mrs. Joscelyn! But, Kate, you did not make Elizabeth joyful enough."

"This was my advice," said Clara; "the strongest feelings are generally least displayed. Elizabeth has shown her disappointment by silent suffering, and she now rejoiced with silent ecstasy. The strength of her character was so great, as well as the power of her affections, that there could be no doubt of her joy. Also her father was a king. The royal daughter did not forget the reticence that belongs to royalty."

"Oh! don't bother me any more with your fine ideas!" said Mrs. Spooner. "I know nothing about royal doings—or men's doings, indeed!"

"And yet Pope, in giving us the only praise he can, says we owe it to a mixture of the manly character.

'And yet believe me, good as well as ill,
Woman's at best a contradiction still—
Heaven, when it strives to polish all it can,
Its last best work but makes a softer man.'

"How unjust, Mrs. Joscelyn! Why don't you tell that Pope, the next time you see him, that there never was anything so untrue!"

"There is one thing that has struck me as very strange," answered Mrs. Joscelyn, quickly, "and that is, how this little wilful wild Kate should be enabled to act such tender scenes. I thought all her talents lay in the gleeful line."

"Which is so nice!" exclaimed Bessie—"I love to be merry and mischievous."

"Miss Bessie!" exclaimed one or two.

"I cannot help it," pleaded Bessie—"I am just like pa."

Mrs. Joscelyn could not help laughing, and they tried to extract from Bessie her definition of mischief, as caught from the squire. Meantime, Clara was teasing her gossip.

"I own you surprised me, for, as your aunt says, I fancied lively matters would suit you best. Do you know, I think it must be all owing to the Arctic regions?"

"*Et tu, Brute?*" was the answer.

Which was considered unanswerable.

Thus did our Ladies spend their time. If they were not

very wise—if they laughed at little things—if they were easily amused, and spent their evenings like children, at least it was all very innocent.

“ Ah ! wretched, and too solitary she,
Who loves not her own company,”

was their motto.

Fortunately they had very fine weather, and in addition to catering for the evening's amusement, they employed a good deal of their time in trying to make a garden.

The old herring man had brought them some implements, and they had ordered seeds and roots to come by the boat on the following Tuesday. They had plenty to do in making walks, forming rockeries, and transplanting ferns. There could be nothing very lively in their lives, for there was no great two-funnelled “ Cannibal ” to excite their interest ; they were accustomed to the visits of the herring man, and it pleased Mrs. Spooner to be in an excellent and unexcitable humour.

Thus the days went by so calmly and smoothly, they hardly knew how time was going ; and it must be confessed that even Mrs. Joscelyn felt the effects of their quiet life, and was in that dasy comfortable state out of which it is so difficult to rouse oneself. So the second Sunday came round, and as they arrayed themselves in their silk dresses and bonnets, they gave a few sighs to the remembrance of the preceding Sunday, now separated from this one in their memories by a very sad space.

The boatman came at nine as before, and providing themselves with tablets to write down some of the inscriptions on the tombstones, and luncheon, they once more left Luff to take care of itself, and took boat for Exe church.





CHAPTER XIII.

PUFF ! PUFF !

SUSAN'S information about the gentlemen was not quite true. The boat was ordered to come every other day to Puff, so delightful was the sensation of seeing it arrive on the Monday week of their sojourn on the island.

And, indeed, they had reason to welcome it.

Their provisions all gone, the hospitable "Cannibal" in the act of steaming away, they were absolutely nervous as to the fear of starvation. When the squire shouted out the fact that the boat was on its way, they all rushed down to meet it.

One asked impatiently for the letters and newspapers, another for any news, a third was curious as to what provisions had come, and, it was evident to the boatmen, that, whether the gentlemen were tired of Puff or not, they greeted them very much as if they were so.

Their excitement being a little cooled down, the squire was enabled to express his gratification at a basket of provisions sent from Deep-Cliffs, that was really delightful to behold. It seemed as if the housekeeper had been inspired, just to send her master those delicacies that he most affected.

A home-made *paté*, the receipt for which shall be handsomely presented to the public and my dear reader gratis, was reposing between a ham ready dressed and a beautiful piece of pressed beef. The half of a Stilton cheese, a quantity of fresh eggs, and a bottle of cream, were among the contents of the basket.

The squire longed to begin his breakfast over again.

It was the sight of the cream that first suggested the idea of having the boat over every other day. They found, did

our fine gentlemen, that, insupportable as life was without leave to smoke, it was even more wretched deprived of cream.

"By-the-bye, Frank," remarked King Crab, as they were settling what should be for dinner, and gloating over all their gastronomic treasures, "where is the sirloin of beef on which we were to have dined yesterday?"

"Where, indeed!" answered Frank, "it is these extraordinary Puff rats. The piece of beef has been eaten by them, bones and all."

"Now, that is too bad! What on earth were those lazy idiots about that they did not look after it?"

"I hoped they had eaten it, but Sam declares his Sunday feasts consisted of nothing but bread and cheese."

"Sam is the greatest ——"

"Or Scruttles the greatest—thief," interrupted Frank.

"Now, Summers, how can you say so? What good can it do that poor fellow to steal anything here?"

"Of whom are you speaking?" interposed the squire.

He was told.

"Humph! that accounts, I think, for a remarkable bundle I saw Scruttles give one of the boatmen. I was curious to know whom it was for, and was rather pleased to find out that that old friend of yours, Crab, is really his mother. Said he to the boatmen, 'Please let my old mother hev my duds for washin' and brink 'em back.' I also remarked what an astonishing bundle it was, considering Scruttles has never changed a single garment that I can discover since he has been here."

"Go on, Squire—yes, go on. Take away the poor fellow's character, just as I have given him a chance to recover it."

"I do not desire to do so, by any means. God forbid that I should take away any man's character, provided he has got one, which I do not think—however, I beg your pardon, Crab; I will say no more."

"You have said quite enough," was the grumpy answer.

That evening, looking carefully round to see that their king was not in sight, the squire confided the rest of his secret opinion regarding Scruttles to Spooner and Frank, being of that disposition, that, if he had an idea on any subject, he must deliver himself of it somehow.

"My opinion is that he stole the beef," he remarked as *sotto voce* as he could.

"My opinion also," said Spooner.

"I know it," added Frank; "for I saw him do it."

"Why in the world did you not say so, Frank?"

"Where was the good? Crabshawe will fight the whole of us sooner than give up his beloved convict. He is a regular thief. Don't you see that I always lock the doors of your rooms when we leave the house at any time?"

"And I wanted to do the man some good! I gave him five shillings, Frank."

"Did you, Squire? It certainly was the only way to his heart."

"But what are we to do?" exclaimed Spooner; "now that the boat is coming so often, he will steal everything."

"Oh! leave me to settle that matter. I don't think he will venture to send any more bundles to his dear mamma, after a little hint I shall give him."

Truly it was a hint.

Just as Scruttles placed upon the dinner-table a tureen of soup, all the gentlemen being seated ready to dine, and more than ready, because they had had no luncheon, Frank said in his coolest manner—

"Scruttles, the next time you send a bundle to your mother, I must take the liberty of seeing whether, by accident, you have not got amongst yours some of my pocket-handkerchiefs. I have told the boatman to open it, or leave it behind."

Scruttles made a hideous grimace, as he answered, in a most abject manner—

"Certingly, Sir; but I mostly thinks has mother 'ool send me a change, vich is hall I wants, Sir, Mr. Summers, axing your parding, Sir."

"I am glad you have a change," remarked Sir George.

"Ho, yes, Sir Folly, axing yer parding, I 'ave a change, thank you, Sir Folly."

As for the squire, all his interest in the "excellent convict" was gone. His five shillings had been thrown away. Not that he regretted them, he simply had a rooted repugnance to a thief and a liar. He would rather Scruttles have knocked him down—*infra dig.* though it was. He hated the sight of him.

Fortunately the weather was beautifully fine, and they were out deep-sea fishing from morning until night. Once or twice they went within a few hundred yards of Luff. On one occasion they were startled (shall we say entranced?) by hearing bursts of silvery laughter coming pealing over the water, straight into their boat.

As long as their cooked provisions lasted they fared well—at least, in comparison with the week before.

And now the dawn of the second Sunday broke upon the Puffites. They decided to go to church.

The squire came down to breakfast, dressed, for the second time since he had been on the island, as a gentleman. The consciousness of looking well, of his clothes fitting faultlessly, of his general appearance being remarkably pleasant, is as agreeable to the feelings of the male species as any amount of finery to the vainest woman living.

The squire was in high good-humour with himself, and he showed it. He ate an excellent breakfast—a feat he excelled in, but this morning he outdid himself. His place at the breakfast-table presented quite an array of *débris*.

After breakfast was over, he became very impatient to go to church, and walked about with his hat in his hand and a large prayer-book under his arm, in a manner that must have been most edifying to his companions.

Mr. Spooner was (we are happy to record this, as it will please his Arabella) a little indifferent about his dress, the boat, and the going to church. He parted his hair on one side in an absent mood, and he consulted both whiskers as to the effect. They were in a state as indifferent as himself, and considered it scarcely worth his while to alter it.

Had we been consulted, we should have said—

“By all means keep it parted on one side, and don’t ever do it otherwise again.”

It was much more becoming.

“I shall not see Arabella,” soliloquised this excellent young husband, “so it does not much signify. But I must see Grimston; though it is Sunday, I must get Grimston to let me have some tobacco. If I go in at the private door, I daresay he will give me leave to hunt the shop for some of the real sort. I need not pay him then, so it won’t look like selling.”

Having settled this matter with his conscience, Mr. Spooner made his appearance at breakfast, looking very spruce. Sir George instantly detected the change in the style of doing his hair, and pronounced upon it, as fervently as one young lady might tell another, “that she looked a love.”

Captain Crabshawe announced his intention of not going to church.

“Why it was necessary to go to church to say one’s prayers, was enough to puzzle the brains of an elephant.”

It is supposed that Captain Crabshawe thought that brains

are doled out to men and animals according to their sizes, without reference to the amount of sense developed.

Just as they were shoving off, he changed his mind, and, muttering his intention of going to his lodgings to get another coat (an intention warmly greeted by his companions), he took his place among them. Sam was already seated in the bow of the boat, as elaborately dressed as his master.

The squire, greatly against the grain, as it was his endeavour to ignore Scruttles as much as possible, yet thought it his duty to give him the option of attending to the welfare of his soul, if he wished it. King Crab scouting the notion, Scruttles solemnly agreed with him.

"I know noffin' about souls—axing yer parding, Sir."

"It is time you should," remarked Frank, who, having more to do with the "excellent convict" than any of the others, took the liberty of giving him advice and reprimand *ad lib.* "But take care you attend to the dinner, for if it is not ready against our return at half-past six o'clock, not one ounce shall you have to eat for two days."

Scruttles grinned like a gorilla, and then bid the departing boat adieu, with a gambol that might have been copied from a lively camel.

Notwithstanding the squire's pious care not to go without his prayer-book, he certainly had not got it with him.

"That is because Elizabeth is not here," grumbled he, after routing out everyone in the boat to find it. "I remember now I put it down on the bench when I lit my cigar."

For though they were going to church, there they all were, puffing away at the pipes of independence, as they floated over the water.

Now, if my readers suppose that these five gentlemen are speeding away to church, influenced by the properest feelings of piety and godliness, they think better of them than they deserve.

They did all go to church; the sweet chimes of the church bells having an effect even upon Captain Crabshawe. And our good squire was certainly in earnest. He never could do two things at once. If he went to church, he went to say his prayers, and he said them with all his heart. His responses were as loud as the clerk's, and he sang the hymns and the psalms with a vigour and power that led one to suppose he was a patent harmonium, or doing duty for one. But in truth the squire at church was a goodly sight. Men looked at him, and women too, and as they looked, gathered their straying thoughts together, and essayed to pray as fervently.

Frank Summers, too, remembered "the hour and the place." He never entered a church without thinking of his gentle, good mother, now a saint in heaven, whose tender eyes did not flash with so much joy at hearing of the honours he gained at school or college, as when he told her of the high thoughts burning within him—thoughts of God and eternity that made the loving mother feel she and her son, with God's blessing, might spend that eternity together. Yet did his thoughts stray a little—his eyes, following his thoughts, fell upon a certain pew. It was now empty, but how often had he gazed on a face and form within that pew, which—well, he would think no more of it; but if anyone had looked at him at that moment, they would have seen a flush upon his cheek—a glowing light in his eyes. Frank says his prayers more fervently than ever, as if he had need to express gratitude of a peculiar kind to the Almighty giver of all good.

As for Mr. Spooner, his thoughts wandered in so perplexing a manner, we can hardly follow them. He was scarcely seated in his pew, when he saw immediately before him a bonnet—almost the fac-simile of the last bonnet in which he had seen his Arabella. He was quite nervous for the moment—could it be she? But only for a moment, for an accidental turning of the head, disclosing the profile of an elderly, red-nosed, undeniable spinster, roused his indignation.

"What business had an old, an ugly woman, to wear a bonnet like his Arabella's? He should make a point of requesting Arabella to put her bonnet on the fire when he saw her next. He could not permit his wife to wear the same sort of bonnet as Miss Smash—certainly not!"

His eyes wandering at this moment, caught sight of Grimston. He was glad to see Grimston at church. A man who performed his religious duties well would be sure to give him good tobacco. Surely there was another bonnet—was Arabella really in the church after all? His neighbours right and left were disturbed by Mr. Spooner's efforts to see the face encircled in this bonnet. He was soon convinced it was not his Arabella—a shower of golden ringlets came from beneath it; anon he saw the face.

This time he was not so indignant, for the face was a very pretty one. Perhaps he would permit Arabella to keep her bonnet. A vague sort of sadness took possession of him as he reproved himself for endeavouring to catch another glimpse of the pretty face. What was the greatest beauty in the world now to him?

Before he could answer himself, right into his ear came the words—"Thou art the man." He was struck as it were with remorse, and remembered that he had come to church for a very different purpose from that which now occupied him. He therefore blew his nose by way of collecting his scattered thoughts, consulted his left whisker, and was tolerably attentive for some time, when suddenly he caught sight of the bald head and purple visage of Mr. Muggs, the proprietor of the best hotel in Rampton.

"There's Muggs at church; I have a mind, before we return to Puff, to get Muggs to let me have a hot lunch in his private parlour. We have not had a decent thing to eat since we have been there."

His thoughts were now divided between his religious duties and what he would order for luncheon; and we are afraid the latter predominated over the former.

As for Sir George, it must be owned he attended church more from a decent habit of propriety than for any good he got by it. He was of that station in society that he was elevated on a little hillock above his fellow-men; so that what he did, and what he did not, were more before the eyes of the world than aught pertaining to them. In deference to the expressed opinion of the world, that it was the proper thing to do, to go to church two or three times a month, he showed himself in his ancestral pew. It was his general habit, on first seating himself therein, to consider how many people would be gratified by seeing him at church. Having satisfied himself that these were not a few, he would begin to scan his fellow-worshippers, all over the church, and settle in his own mind who was the prettiest woman in it. Before very long, on this particular Sunday, he had come to the conclusion there was not a decent woman among the whole female congregation. Far be it from us to insinuate that he was stigmatising them as "no better than they should be;" a phrase indicative of an awful state of things, yet miserably obscure, grammatically analysed. No, he only meant personally. Taken personally, there was not a pretty woman in the church.

"Perhaps," he thought, "I miss Miss Daintree; certainly there is no one to equal her. The man she marries will have ——"

"Thou art the man!" smote upon his ear. He was startled, and began for the first time to pay attention to his religious duties. He felt an unusual degree of softness in his heart.

Miss Daintree rose before his mental vision, clothed in angelic perfections. These seemed to increase into full-blown loveliness, when he thought of the famous admiral's encomiums, and the positive outspoken admiration of his friend, Colonel Erne. True, one was a sailor—sailors were proverbially enthusiastic upon every pretty face they saw. Still, Miss Daintree was more than a pretty girl; she had sense, and wit, and a thousand sweetnesses. Also, amid all her girlish liveliness, there was a certain dignity, or self-respect in her character, that pleased him more than anything. He was a male flirt, he acknowledged it. He liked to go to the extremest verge of flirtation with a girl, and then draw back. He had something in his nature of the characteristics of the spider. He loved to sport with his victims. His heart smote him as he thought of the laceration one or two hearts had suffered through this love of sport.

Now, much as he had endeavoured to lacerate the heart of Miss Daintree, she had never permitted him to see that he could wound her at all. She was merry and lively when he devoted himself to her; and she was merry and lively when he devoted himself to some other girl, before her very face!

This he unconsciously admired in her, though all the time he kept assuring himself that he would make her love him, before he finally brought himself to the culminating point of asking her to become Lady Follett. For, that she was eventually to be so was the end of all his thoughts on the subject, even when provoked and irritated by the unnecessary advice of Captain Crabshawe. Now, as said before, his heart unusually softened, he came to the conclusion she was the more to be beloved because her maiden dignity would always prevent her showing her love until assured of his—*ergo*, he would propose to her the first favourable opportunity after the challenge was over. He would allow no more Crimean heroes to go hovering about her, and staring at her beauty. The future Lady Follett belonged to him and him only. He grew impatient to proclaim the right. A whole fortnight more of misery, ennui, starvation!

As he thought this, his eyes chanced to fall on the rubicund visage of Mr. Muggs, on whose bald pate a sunbeam, with the help of a ray from a painted window, was enacting all sorts of phosphoric gambols.

"Muggs at church! Muggs has a good cook—his veal cutlets are excellent! I think I shall order myself a dinner at Muggs's. Everything at Puff seems, with all Frank's care,

to be messed by that dirty beast Scruttles. I have no appetite there. Ah ! there is Sam—how melancholy and wretched he looks since he has been at Puff ! I shall tell Sam to go and get a good blow-out, too, wherever he likes.”

So much for the manner in which Sir George Follett attended to his religious duties.

As for Captain Crabshawe, the estimation in which he was held by the bulk of mankind, or rather the circle in which he lived, was not such as to make it a matter of a moment’s thought what he did with himself on Sundays or other days. Consequently, not having a character to keep up like Sir George, he only went to church when it pleased him, and that was very seldom.

In fact, going to church made him nervous. He had the feelings of a man who knows that there is a writ out against him, and that he may be tapped on the shoulder any minute, and have it served on him.

Thus, when the clergyman pronounced so emphatically, “Thou art the man,” he could not help glancing behind him. He wished he were near the door, that he might creep out unobserved. How he came to church he did not know, for close, confined places always disagreed with him. He felt twinges of rheumatism all over him, besides a slight giddiness. Perhaps he had smoked more than was good for him.

Ah ! there was Muggs, his bald head shining out like the knob of a well-polished umbrella handle. He would adjourn to Muggs’s, and have a couple of glasses of stiff brandy-and-water—that would brighten him up a bit, and take away his nervousness. And if Muggs had a round of beef in cut, he would go in for a plateful or so, with mashed potatoes—a delicacy he much delighted in, and which it had been found impossible to make at Puff.

The rest of the captain’s thoughts are not worth recording.

The service was over. Our five gentlemen gathered together from their different pews into one focus—the door ; but, strange to say, when the squire looked round for them, after greeting a few of his Rampton acquaintances, no one was near him but Frank. The others had unaccountably disappeared.

So, arm-in-arm, the two friends paraded up and down a short time.

“What a doleful thing a town is on a Sunday, Frank !”

“It is, Squire. Let us go down to the pier.”

“Why, Puff is more lively.”

“Certainly, Squire,” responded the amiable Frank.

They took some turns up and down the pier.

"What can have become of all the people?" exclaimed the squire, as they discovered they had this usual promenade all to themselves.

"Everybody is at luncheon, I suppose," answered Frank.

"By-the-bye, that is a capital idea! Let us go, Frank, to Muggs's, and have a good luncheon. No offence to you, my dear fellow, who have, I am sure, done your best; but I have a longing to eat something nicely-dressed."

"A most reasonable longing. Why should we not dine here, instead of going home?"

"Capital! where are the others? Do let us seek for them and propose it," exclaimed the squire, wholly unconscious of the ironical stress that Frank laid upon the word "home." He required all things to be plainly developed to his understanding, and saw nothing in Frank's words but an uncommonly sensible idea.

"Or let us go at once to Muggs's and order the dinner; and we will not tell them, Frank, until it is ready—it will be such an agreeable surprise!"

"We must treat them to it, Squire, or it will be by no means agreeable to King Crab. In fact, his pleasure in eating it will be lost in the pang of paying for it."

"By Jove! you are right, Frank; that is even more sensible than the first idea. Crab comes of a thrifty family; which is, I believe, a great virtue, but I cannot say that the Joscelyns ever practised it. Between you and me, Frank, I am no hand at hoarding; I like that command in the Bible, where we are bidden not to let the left hand know what the right gives—but hullo! there's Muggs off somewhere! Muggs! Muggs!"

As for Mr. Muggs pretending not to hear the squire's call, that was impossible! Even the suburbs of Rampton might have heard the summons.

He obeyed the squire at once, who rushed immediately into the delightful excitement of ordering a first-rate dinner, wholly oblivious of a curious display of dissolving expressions on the rosy face of Mr. Muggs, that came and went with marvellous rapidity.

"Dinner for five—a guinea a-head, iced champagne, every delicacy you can think of—but rabbits and flounders."

"Or herrings," suggested Frank.

"Or herrings," echoed the squire; "I don't care if I never see another herring all my life; but what is the matter, Muggs?"

"I have already orders for three dinners, Squire ; and when you called me, I was just about running to Shanks for a delicate veal cutlet for Sir George. I know Shanks killed a veal on Friday, and though it is the Sabbath, I feel sure he will oblige me with some."

"Three dinners !"

"Yes, Squire, Mr. Spooner came first, and ordered a rump-steak, Sir, with a shalot or two ; a greengage tart, with Devonshire cream ; Stilton cheese, a salad, a pint of hock. Sir George, mulligitawny soup, a sole filleted, veal cutlets, a duckling, green peas, an orange marmalade soufflé, bottle of Burgundy ; Sam to have the run of his teeth—so Sir George expressed it, Squire. The captain, Sir, he has ordered two plates of cold biled, mashed potatoes, and a jam puff. The drink not settled."

"Do they all dine together !"

"Oh ! no, Mr. Summers ; they not only don't dine together, but have each a separate apartment. The captain—he, Sir, dines in the bar, Sir !"

The squire was silent from astonishment. His bewildered thoughts wandered through the mazes of thought, engendered by the curious habits and idiosyncrasies of the human species. He felt as if his mind had experienced a rude blow, which he longed to return in the flesh.

He recovered himself sufficiently to echo Frank's order.

"Put all the dinners together in one room, on one table. They shall have their own and our dinners too, and, Squire, we will pay for all."

"It will be a lesson, Frank," murmured he, as they departed to kill the time until the dinner hour. The squire seldom moralised ; when he did it was so great an effort, that he felt quite sleepy after it. So he laid himself down under a tree and fell fast asleep ; but before he had quite composed himself, he imparted to Frank the pith of his moralising :

"I don't think a woman would have done it, Frank !"

"Of course not, Squire."

While this worthy gentleman slept himself into his usual normal state of happy content, Frank bethought him of the discomfiture that would ensue, did their intended guests meet suddenly the shock of an exposure.

His ideas of an entertainment consisted in its being enjoyed both mentally and physically. He was not going to give so much money for a feast, if this feast was to disagree with the guests through discomposure of mind, than which

nothing so interferes with a perfect digestion. No sting of remorse should embitter the first gulp of champagne, no twinge of conscience interfere with the enjoyment of discussing an excellent and well-appointed dinner.

How was this to be managed?

Frank was well aware that, among his companions, he passed for a man of easy good-nature; nay, when it suited them, they made prodigious use of that good-nature, even going so far as to consider him, in the matter of being imposed upon very often, as closely allied to the numerous family of the fools.

This appreciation of his merits was so far beneficial to him, that they confided in him, as a man confides in his valet. They did not care to appear in his eyes as heroes; on the contrary, they were upon the comfortable terms of being under no restraint before or with him. Their weaknesses, their little sins and follies, were as patent to his sight as their own. Indeed, rather more so, if we are to believe "Burns."

But with the squire it was very different. There was a bluntness about him, a disregard of agreeable subterfuge, a plainness of speech, joined to an utter incapability of fibbing, or even compromising, that made him an object of dread to the dealer in trifling hypocrisy. No lie, however cheerful in aspect, went down with him. He seemed indeed to take especial pleasure in examining its showy dress, and stripping it naked to view. Without being remarkable for a great share of wisdom, he had an instinct for the truth, that made him detect the least departure therefrom, with a sagacity almost miraculous. Thus Frank knew that their three friends would bear with fortitude, or rather they would not care at all, that he should know of their three private dinners; but with Squire Joscelyn, the knowledge would be attended with such dismay, such dread of his turbulent tongue, his ungovernable truth, that they never would recover it. The dinner would be an entire failure.

So he set off in search of his friends, trusting to inspiration to arrange the matter. He met Mr. Spooner alone, who did not appear so well pleased to see his Puff brother as might be expected. In fact, he was hurrying to Muggs, on his own little private business.

"Spooner," said Frank, linking his arm inexorably in his, "you are just the person I wished to see. The squire, inspired by a happy thought, has ordered a first-rate dinner for us all at Muggs's, and I give the wine."

"At Muggs's?"

"Yes, I have been there, and finding that you had ordered your luncheon, I thought you would forgive me for unordering it, as the squire will be disappointed if you do not do justice to his feast."

Now Spooner at once felt an inward conviction that Frank knew all about his private little arrangement, and he was honestly ashamed; moreover he confessed it. Frank soothed him over with a few more doses of polite fibbing, and it ended in Mr. Spooner's experiencing that lightness of heart which is the consequence of easing one's conscience of a load, and he gave himself over to the delights of happy anticipation.

To do Spooner justice, nothing but an absolute craving for something palatable to eat, made him at all put up with the disagreeableness of what he called "feeding alone." Frank told him where to find the squire, and they separated.

Summers found Sir George reading the newspaper in the coffee-room, and feeling no need, in his case, to resort to any soothing, or polite fibbing, he said at once—

"The squire joins with me, in giving you a dinner to-day at Muggs's, instead of going home."

"But I have ordered mine already!" answered Sir George; "mulligi —"

"Tawny soup, veal cutlets, duckling, peas, orange something. I ordered your dinner to be put with ours, George, I thought it looked better."

"Certainly, Frank, you did quite right; I had no idea any of you cared to dine on shore, otherwise I would have proposed it before."

"I have no doubt of it," answered Frank.

Thus he had managed two of his intended guests; one sensitive, and the other totally ignorant of having done anything but what was most natural.

King Crab was to be treated after a very different fashion.

"The squire has ordered Muggs to provide us with a first-rate dinner, and has sent me to invite you."

"Anything to pay?"

"No."

"I accept with pleasure. Between you and me, Summers, the squire loves his stomach, and I don't see why we should not take advantage thereof."

"He loves a good dinner, but he does not like to eat it alone. He could not enjoy a plate of cold beef and mashed potatoes by himself."

The captain winced a little, just as a rhinoceros might, at

the pinge of a bullet against his rough hide. But he showed no other symptom of having a conscience, and shortly left Frank, who knew he did so to go and unorder the plate of cold "biled."

When they all met to eat this famous dinner, the good squire was the only one who felt a little uneasy. He wished them all to enjoy themselves, but he also desired that they should feel he was hurt. He wanted them to sit down in an hilarious mood, yet he longed to fling at their heads a few of the hard stones of truth.

His feelings as a gentleman urged him to treat his guests courteously, but his wrongs as a man and a brother goaded him to take revenge. But his mind was completely thrown off its balance by finding them as gay and unconcerned as if they had never perpetrated, even in thought, an act contrary to the rules of good-fellowship.

He began to think that Muggs had made a mistake, and his good heart rejoiced. With the first bumper of champagne he dismissed all bitterness of mind, and they ate and drank jovially.

It was not until dinner was over, and they were all in that complacent mood that follows a special good time, that Frank, with much innocence of manner, propounded the question as to whether they had not infringed upon the stringent rules of the challenge, and forfeited their right to win by dining on shore.

The squire was so shocked at the bare supposition of having broken a rule, or his word, that he was wholly unable to speak.

Mr. Spooner reddened to the roots of his hair, and clutched a whisker so vehemently, that between pain and surprise, he exclaimed, as any woman might,

"Goodness gracious!"

Sir George smiled. Secretly he thought, "If we have infringed the challenge, of course it is over." A vision of a lovely blushing face, half visible through a magnificent veil of Brussels lace, his own particular present, standing beside him at an altar, filled him with the most delightful sensation. He was lost in the mental contemplation of a bridal scene.

King Crab, invigorated by champagne, loudly declared the ladies had no business to interfere with their little pleasure.

After a great deal of discussion, in which Sir George was the only dissentient voice, I grieve to say that the gentlemen

settled among themselves not to mention the episode of dining on shore.

"Unless," stipulated the squire, "Elizabeth asks me the question point-blank."

They all agreed with the squire that, if Mrs. Joscelyn did propound the question, the squire must answer it truthfully.

"Women," remarked King Crab, "as a general rule, uniformly ask just what they ought to know nothing about; but, as regarded Mrs. Joscelyn, he must do her the justice to say she was less likely to do so than the rest of her sex."

The squire acknowledged this compliment to his wife with a nod, which, whether it was meant to express gratitude or reciprocity of sentiment, was accepted by the captain with much urbanity.

Thus, upon the whole, they passed their Sunday much to their satisfaction; as regarded their religious duties, they were not without hope that they had fulfilled them in an exemplary manner; and with respect to the duty they owed themselves, nothing could be more gratifying than the way in which it had been performed.

It was about nine o'clock when they started for home, as Frank repeated at every opportunity with emphasis. The moon had not yet risen, but worlds of stars were twinkling their little lights, as if rejoicing that she was on her way.

Delicious as it is at all times to float upon the water (that is, if one's digestion does not take umbrage at the motion), at no time is it more so than at night. The beauty of the heavens is twofold—it is reflected upon the sea, until one of a fervid imagination might almost fancy he was sailing through the blue vault of heaven, towards the lands of the blest. To be sure, the landing at Puff might dispel the illusion. But, at present, those who were awake gave themselves up to the contemplation of the loveliness and beauty of the night.

There was a luminous shimmer on the sea that gave it the appearance of liquid silver. There was a purity and balm in the air that refreshed them like the waters of Nepenthe. There was a silence, yet a melody, in the sea, to which the gentle sound of the plashing oars kept time, that soothed them as a happy dream.

Sir George took the opportunity of completing his mental picture of that intended bridal-day, until he had worked

himself up into such a state of fervour on the subject, his heart bounded and throbbled with an emotion as delicious as it was novel.

Mr. Spooner composed an ode, which will be found in the journal. It was his happiest effort, and he mused over and repeated it to himself, until he experienced quite a glow of gratified vanity.

Frank's face, if it was the index of his mind, faintly visible every now and then through the ray of a star lighting it up, might lead one to suppose that some beneficent being had crowned him with an especial happiness that was seldom bestowed upon mortals, a happiness that is felt but cannot be expressed. Mortal pens cannot write them, even if mortal words could portray it. Only those crowned in like manner can imagine the feelings filling Frank's bosom and illuming his face.

When a man fulfils his daily duties with an honest and true heart—when he is the soul of honour and incapable of wronging anyone but himself—when he shows, and is not afraid to show, those gentle enthusiastic feelings belonging to a woman, and is, besides, manly, brave, and courteous—when he glories in his position as man, because it gives him the title and permission to be the protector and guardian of woman—then does he feel as our Frank felt, crowned with that especial happiness that belongs to the good.

Beside him sat one who, from education and habit, thought and acted very differently. He considered woman, according to that reason given at the birth of Eve, as created for the pleasure of man. In a word, he thought her of an inferior nature to himself. He owned the world would be wretched, desolate, a very Pandemonium without women, yet he would not elevate them to any standard. They were playthings, tools, trifles, with whom to fool away hours of leisure and ease.

With these feelings in his heart, he had taken advantage of his position in the world to flirt with, to deceive, to bamboozle, to blight the existence of many of those inferior creatures called women. Had he been told that he was acting a dishonourable part to single out a young lady to make her conspicuous by his attentions, to let her name be coupled with his (we will say nothing of her affections being trifled with), he would have laughed. How could it be dishonourable to amuse oneself with a little flirting? But I am glad to record that, on this lovely night, nature all soft and beautiful, there fell a veil from the soul of this man. He felt

the true nature of love—he realised its purity, divinity, its exalted aspirations. He understood what was meant by the word “helpmeet;” he acknowledged to himself that a woman can be to a man what nothing else in all creation can be, part of himself—“bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh.” In anticipating the honour and worship due to his intended wife, Sir George placed the whole female sex on a proper pedestal in his esteem.

But they have arrived at Puff—at home.

No friendly and welcoming Scruttles comes to meet them with a lantern, and a joyful greeting. Silence and darkness reign supreme.

The squire had brought a hamper with him, containing a dozen bottles of champagne.

Regarding this hamper as something precious, he ordered one of the boatmen to help Sam to carry it to the house, so that if one stumbled, the other might be at hand to save the contents from an indiscreet fall.

Thus they proceeded cautiously. They approached; not a light in the house; dark, impenetrable silence! Sam, cognisant of a box of matches, procured a light. By the dim obscurity of one candle they proceeded to look for the “excellent convict.”

There were symptoms of his having laid the cloth for dinner; or was it only the remains of breakfast still on the table? It was.

And everything was covered with a coating of fine sand, which proved but too clearly, if any untoward fate had befallen the lonely Scruttles, it must have occurred very early in the day.

“Has he been murdered?” whispered Spooner sepulchraly.

“Good heavens! no,” exclaimed the squire, who was matter-of-fact to the last degree; “the spoons and forks seem all safe, and who would run the risk of being hanged for Scruttles?”

“Perhaps he has gone.”

“Joy go with him!”

Meantime the search continued with unabated vigour; more candles were lit, until, in their anxiety, some carried two, one in each hand. But each fresh light only showed their home in a state of most “admired disorder.”

Everything down-stairs seemed exactly in the same state in which they had left it. Up-stairs they rushed. Not a bed made, not a basin emptied! Those who were untidy in their

habits had the pain of exposure, for just where they had thrown their garments, there did they still lie.

The orderly ways of the squire did him good service. There was the side of the room he occupied jointly with Spooner as tidy as possible, but his practised eye noted a change. How came half-a-dozen black bottles lying by his bedside—promiscuously thrown there? A snort from the bed made them rush towards it. There lay the lost Scruttles! Was he dead? Yes, after a fashion!

“Poor fellow!” exclaimed King Crab; “the loneliness has been too much for him.”

“Carry the beast away!” roared the squire; “why should he pitch upon my bed on which to sleep away his drunkenness? I should like to know why my bed was chosen?”

“You gave him five shillings, you know.”

“I will not sleep in it; I will pass the night in a chair. Why did the beast choose my bed?”

“It was the only one made, I fancy, Squire. Don’t you remember making it so tidily before you began to shave?”

“And for that animal! Take him away! Let him go back in the boat, and take all my bedding, and bring me fresh to-morrow from Deep-Cliffs. Burn that, whatever you do, or you will have jail fever!”

This was spoken to the boatmen, who, with Sam (nothing loth), were employed in rousing the “excellent convict.” But he was too hopelessly drunk to be roused, so they carried him like a log of wood down to the boat, into which they flung him without much ceremony, pitching the bedding in after him.

Meantime, on a suggestion from Frank, who courteously asked leave of King Crab, a note was written to Muggs, to bid him send them a proper cook the next day. The captain blandly consented, partly out of remembrance of the excellent dinner he had just eaten, and partly from a twinge of gratitude that no one taunted him with the dereliction of his “excellent convict.”

They saw the boat off, not without a feeling of joy that they were rid of Scruttles, though no one openly said so. The most charitable amongst them hoped that, at all events, he would awake in the morning a wiser though a sadder man.

Then they worked with a will to get things into decent order, during which business Sam exerted himself with so much alacrity and wit, that even King Crab had a good word for him.

It was almost twelve o'clock before they finished their household duties, winding up with improvising beds for the squire and Spooner in the saloon ; for various little incidents that must have occurred to Scruttles during the course of his Sunday debauch, had rendered their joint room vastly disagreeable.

There was such a meekness and amiability about King Crab, that they ventured to make one or two remarks on Scruttles, which he took in good part.

"My idea of that fellow is," said the squire, "that from his very infancy he has been a beast. We may congratulate ourselves that nothing worse has happened. He might have levanted with everything, or set fire to the house. That he has got drunk on the only occasion left open to him, is less a matter of wonder than annoyance. Though as for annoyance, I can only say, we may all congratulate ourselves we are rid of him !"

"I think it was a very good idea sending for a proper cook," observed Spooner.

"Now that is a thing I cannot understand," said King Crab, just beginning to feel a little nettled ; "why are eating and drinking the sole things a man cares for ?"

"Not the sole things, but they are obviously the first cause of everything ; we live to eat, and we cannot live without eating. Hunger makes a man work ; hunger sharpens a man's wits ; hunger is the top and the bottom, the beginning and end of everything we do."

"Bravo ! Squire ; I could not have explained the matter more psychologically than you have done !"

"Humph !" growled the squire ; "I am going to bed."

He had a mortal aversion to Spooner's learned disquisitions, as much because he understood nothing about them, as because he felt sure they smacked of guess rather than certainty ; and, with all his love of truth, he was unable to contradict him.

Frank had gone, according to usual custom, to take a last look at what he called the heavens. Certainly Luff might have seemed a sort of heaven to him. To-night, for the first time, Sir George accompanied him.

The moon was just rising.

"All seems calm and safe," said Sir George.

"Yes, a more lovely night I never saw."

"I have thought a good deal to-day, Frank."

"I hope they have been thoughts to your liking ?"

"Partly. I used to laugh at you, Frank, for your chivalrous

notions about women. I wish—I wish I had been taught as you have been, to respect them.”

“I was not taught. When a child, I loved and respected my mother; as I grew up, I respected all women for her sake.”

“Was she so good a mother?”

“She was a true woman; gentle, tender, and unselfish. But even had she possessed none of these qualities, still, being my mother, I should have loved her; and being a woman, I respected her.”

“Only because she was a woman?”

“Yes, George, and for this reason: man’s life being imperfect—woman was made to complete it. She is therefore his peculiar charge. If he ill-treats her, neglects her, he is answerable for her sins. Let a man elevate a woman to the proper standard, namely, as the better part of himself, and she has the best and holiest reasons for acting up to that standard!”

“Then you think we men are, in a measure, answerable for the sins of women?”

“We won’t say all. There are some which belong entirely to their own sex and habits. But there is a sensitiveness about women, and an unselfishness, that makes them, in the first instance, peculiarly alive to appreciation; and in the second, singularly devoted and affectionate.”

“Have you ever been in love, Frank? before ——”

Sir George paused; he was going to say “before you saw Miss Severn.”

But he was not quite sure whether he might venture to touch upon a matter that seemed at present in a very delicate crisis.

“I fell in love,” answered Frank at once, “with a girl (I ought to call her a woman) when I was only eighteen, and she was two or three and twenty, perhaps more. That was the first time. She was just that sort of person who might beguile a boy out of his heart—*petite*, delicate, fair, a lovely face, and graceful figure. Everybody admired her, and wondered why she did not marry. For my part, when I first began to descry the dawns of love, I concluded that fate had designed her for me, and so kept her free. She had a soft, beguiling voice, a gentle, beseeching manner. She was truly a woman—a thing in those days I admired. I liked them to be helpless. You must know that she was, is, first cousin to the squire, but, as you are never likely to meet her anywhere, I don’t mind telling you how she played with that toy, my heart. That is, if you like to hear it.”

“By all means, Frank—nothing I should like better.”

“The squire, you must know, was rather unfortunate in his parents. His father was one of those rough, uncouth natures who have sterling qualities, though they are developed in a disagreeable manner. Imagine a person like our squire, without his *bonhomie*, without being softened, as the squire evidently has been softened, by living with such a woman as his wife.

“His mother was a showy, fine woman, who caught her husband’s fancy by her bold and resolute character, and lost it afterwards by practising those virtues in private life.

“As he said, ‘We don’t want two masters in my house. I am master, and, if you won’t take your proper position as mistress, and mistress only, I recommend you to seek another home. You shall not live here.’ Which advice she took, and made her residence in Bath, where she led a life into which we need not make further inquiries.

“Her husband was more than forty when he married her, and life, you know, in those days, was not so long as now. Port wine and bad habits began to tell on his constitution at forty, while an hereditary tendency to gout came on, and helped to put an end to him before our squire was ten years old.

“His uncle was appointed his guardian, whose only daughter was the young lady I am speaking of—my first love. Her name was Eliza, but she chose to be called by her friends Elise, though her father, with the stubborn characteristics of his family, always persisted in calling her by the first name.

“Her mother was an invalid, and had been so for many years, so Elise had been virtually mistress of her father’s house for many years. She and our squire had known each other from the time his father died. She was a little the elder.

“Now, though she had made up her mind to marry the squire very early in their young lives, she was incapable of resisting admiration. She was never satisfied unless she had some one dangling after her. But I will confine myself simply to my own case. She was one of those dangerous women, a true flirt. She made no difficulty of telling me in private that she loved me, and only me, while in public she received the adulation and flattery of anyone who would give it her. I saw this, and yet was foolish enough to be wheedled out of my natural indignation whenever she chose. Perhaps she might have seriously endangered my peace of

mind, or, at all events, soured me as to the merits of the feminine world, but for the announcement of the squire's intended marriage. I do not know if he had ever professed love for her, or given her any reason to suppose he loved her, or, in fact, acted in such a way as to lead the world to think he had jilted her. I had never seen him, or, indeed, heard much of him ; for, though she often talked of her cousin, it was in a careless, indifferent manner. Moreover, I knew he seldom wrote, though he was and had been abroad for two years ; and when he did write, the letter was always short, always to ask remittances, and invariably addressed to his aunt.

"Thus I was taken greatly by surprise at the sudden effect of this news upon her. She was simply furious. To see this little delicate woman—always so beautifully dressed, so feminine in her ways, so dainty in her speech, giving way to a fit of passion—was, my dear George, the most painful scene I ever witnessed in all my life. She had a very peculiar way of doing her hair, like no one I ever saw—it was a fashion of her own, and suited her wonderfully. Well, don't laugh at me, but in her rage she disarranged her hair. You would have been as startled as I was in the change it made in her. She was absolutely ugly. Her low, receding brow was exposed ; large, thin, hideously-shaped ears were brought forward ; and, so far from looking like a woman, she reminded me of nothing but a vindictive weasel, intent upon hunting its prey to death.

"'Frank,' she exclaimed, as soon as she could speak coherently, 'we must prevent this marriage ; it must not take place ; I will have him up for breach of promise ; I will expose him ; I will poison her ! kill her !'"

"Really, to think of the squire having inspired such a frantic attachment !"

"I do not wish to deteriorate from the squire's merits, for they must have been great to gain him the affections of Mrs. Joscelyn ; but his cousin Elise was not put into this rage by disappointed love, but because she was disappointed in gaining an end. She had settled that she would marry her cousin, and, whether an eligible plan or not, her temper would not brook being thwarted. No, I consider Elise to have been incapable of any love, but the love of her own way."

"Do you suppose the squire had really given her any cause to think he loved her ?"

"Jealous as I was of him at the time, my reason asserted that he could have given her very little. After I knew him

I was confident that, if anything, he disliked her. Certainly they were as opposite in character as fire and water. He was all frankness; he could no more hide a sensation than he could tell an untruth. She was, from the crown of her head to the sole of her feet, wholly made up of deceit. It was the happiness of her life to have a mystery. Before she exposed her real character to me in this fit of passion, I had been pained by this flaw in her character. My love, which was open and honourable, she persisted in investing with all the odiums and inconveniences of a secret attachment. She was for ever placing me in positions abhorrent to my nature, and using the plausible excuse that it was for my sake.

"Her father and mother would be angry at my presumption, so mere a boy. More than once I had said, I would incur their displeasure rather than hate myself for deceiving them. Then would she answer, 'that I thought only of myself, and not her, and that it would kill her if deprived of my society.'"

"She seems to have bamboozled you well, Frank; I wonder you had patience with any of the sex afterwards."

"I was not going to lose my faith in them, because it was my chance to meet with one like Elise. I owed it to my mother to pit her virtues against this woman's small, degrading sins. Besides, I was soon cured of my love for her when I saw her in juxtaposition with Mrs. Joscelyn."

"Did the squire bring home his bride, then?"

"He brought her, or rather she came, to pay his relations a visit before they married. It was only by a miracle, and a good fate, that they ever got married at all. I fancy Mrs. Joscelyn could tell an extraordinary tale, if she chose. The battle of truth and honour against hypocrisy and craft was, if I mistake not, a very sharp one. I was obliged to leave in the very middle of it, so I don't know how they conquered."

"Perhaps the squire would tell us?"

"I very much question if he knows anything about it, and he could not understand the crooked ways of Elise if he tried to do so. He had a perception that she was artful, and not to his mind, but that made no difference to him. As for Mrs. Joscelyn, I think she understood her at once, or, at all events, very soon.

"I was in the house when she arrived; a blooming, beautiful, blushing girl, all frankness and innocence. She felt her position—alone, without any of her relations, come to be inspected as it were, and that not by a future father and mother, but by those uncomfortable, criticising sorts of

people, uncles and aunts. She had not the satisfaction of trying to win their affections, for they were cold-hearted, frigid people, and asked her to visit them more out of compliment to the squire than anything else. This she appears to have understood at once, and accepted the terms on which she was to be held.

"But there was something so artless, at the same time sensible, in her manner—a tact so singular, yet perfectly natural—that she made a conquest of the uncle and aunt in a very short time. They could not help loving her. What delighted the old gentleman the most, was her pretty frank way with her intended husband.

"Without the least affectation of nonsense, or a parade of sentimentalism or prudery, she showed her affection for him, and her thorough appreciation of what it was to have a lover. This charmed him. One instance in particular I remember. There was to be a dinner-party, and, according to the scheming of Elise, the lovers were not to go in to dinner together. In vain the old gentleman tried to overrule Elise.

"‘Never mind,’ said the young bride, smiling, ‘we can exchange looks!’”

"I should like to have seen the squire in love."

"He was by no means a fond lover; indeed, he acted that phase in his life pretty much in the same way as he acts the part of husband. He is very uncomfortable without his Elizabeth. Once she was very ill indeed; I think it was after little Bessie's birth. He had been always hankering for a daughter, and I remember meeting him wild with delight that this little longed-for stranger had arrived. I never saw him more jubilant and gay. Do you know, my dear George, three days after that, I saw him, and did not know him. He seemed absolutely shrivelled up with grief. He could not rest, he could not sleep; he had eaten nothing the two days she was in imminent danger; only he drank—drank great tumblers of wine, which had no more effect on him than water. They sent for me to be with him; indeed, if the worst had happened—which at that time was most imminent, there was every fear that his reason might give way, and, unable to support life without her, he might, overcome by the shock, make away with himself. We had stringent orders to remove everything like a weapon, or that might be used as an instrument of destruction, from his sight."

"Poor dear squire! He is the last man I ever should have picked out as likely to die for love of a woman!"

"She was his wife, remember; perhaps he would have borne it better had they not been married."

"I argue just the contrary, Frank. I know many men who —"

"I am not going to listen to anything unorthodox. Let me finish my tale. I seem to have lost sight of my own sufferings, talking of the squire's."

"Keep them back for a moment, while you tell me how long the squire was in this sad condition."

"For nearly a week. He was at last so reduced, and so nervous, that he was unable to leave his room, and twenty times in an hour he would send me to her door to make inquiries. She had brain fever, or something of that sort, brought on by the culpable negligence of the nurse, who accidentally set fire to the bed-curtains the day after her confinement; and though she and her baby were rescued in time, she was carried in a hurry to a bed on which they had put unaired sheets. But, at all events, I knew she had brain fever, for I used to hear her voice, not exactly raving, but quietly crooning, as it were, snatches of old songs; and at times she would repeat psalms and prayers. In fact, her mind was in that happy state that, dangerously ill as she was, there was no difficulty in nursing her. The sweetness and loveliness of her disposition was as strongly developed when bereft of reason, as at her sanest moments."

"It was to this calmness, this gentleness, that she owed her life. She never disputed a single thing the doctor commanded, when he asked her to do it to 'please him.'"

"Of course," she would say, 'anything to please you.'

"Once I persuaded her husband to go to her door, thinking it would comfort him to hear her voice so happily talking. It so happened that she mentioned his name."

"John! John!" she exclaimed, as if calling him, 'why don't you answer your Lizzy?'

"He rushed into the room, thinking she was really sane and called him, and when he found that, though he held her in his arms, and laid his tear-stained face against her flushed one, that she still kept calling—"

"John! John! why don't you answer your Lizzy?'

"It was too much for him. He sobbed aloud."

"She did not know him in the least."

"I did not tell him when the crisis was at hand. I thought the shock either way was better for him to bear than the suspense."

"At last I heard that she slept—the one thing for which we were all praying.

"I went down-stairs and ordered a light dinner to be prepared and sent up to a small boudoir that was placed half-way up the stairs. When it was ready I took him there, but he turned away as usual, loathing the food.

"'God has been very good,' I said, 'your wife sleeps. When she awakes it will be for life or death. Eat, therefore, that you may have strength to see her either way.'

"He was like a meek, little child, and I could see that, as he ate, a ravenous hunger came upon him, which I thought it well to indulge. The effect of so much food, after such unusual fasting, was, as I hoped, to make him drowsy. He fell fast asleep, with a mouthful almost unswallowed, and his slumber was almost as beneficial to him as to his wife. It was so heavy that he did not snore as usual, which was the reason I had him moved to this lower room, for fear he should do so and disturb his wife. Though I don't think it would have done so, her nature is such that, well or ill, nothing annoys her but wickedness. When the squire awoke, I had the happiness of telling him his wife was out of danger. He squeezed my hand until I could have roared. And the dear fellow went into his bed-room and, I am certain, fell on his knees, and thanked God heartily."

"Well, he never gave me the least idea of that sort of man; and he is often so brusque with his wife."

"He is so; but that is the peculiarity of his character. He always acts and speaks just as he thinks. Nine times out of ten his impulses are good. Can we all say the same?"

"I fear not. I for one should be sorry to speak all the thoughts of my mind. They would disgrace me, I know. The squire is the last man I ever thought to elevate into a hero, especially a tender one. So go on, Frank, with the laceration of your heart. I expect to be wonderfully touched."

"Then your expectations will not be verified. I daresay, if Elise had died, I should have mourned her as deeply as the most tender lover. But, my dear George, love vanishes like smoke when there is no esteem. A feeling of honour retained me by her side for a time, just to assist her, if I discovered that Mr. Joscelyn had really given her cause for her accusations. But, you must allow, I should have been more than a fool not to see that I had been befooled. It was rather a relief to find she was incapable of love—that is, love

such as I wanted. She was very artful, and nearly drew me into a partnership with her to separate the young lovers, and make them quarrel. But the indomitable frankness of the squire, and the faith and innocence of his *fiancée*, seemed so likely to be a match for all her arts, that I left them all, as the safest course to pursue."

"And what became of her?"

"I never wilfully vilify a woman. Get her fate out of the squire, if you are curious."

"And did you never love again between then and now?"

"I went out to the Mauritius for four years, to look after some property of my father's. When I came home, he was dead, and my mother fell into the illness that lasted until her death, two years ago."

"Well, Frank, I won't pry further into your secrets. It is astonishing how much better human nature is than we are taught to think it. If Spooner was here, he would give us learned reasons for this, no doubt."

"Poor Spooner! much learning will not make him mad. He picks up a hard word or two, and applies them according to sound rather than sense. But 'tis an innocent amusement."

"Now, his wife is a woman I should hate to live with."

"I fancy if I was obliged to marry her, I would beg to part at the church door."

"Do I hear aright? The most *preux chevalier* the ladies possess, absolutely professing to dislike one?"

"How can I appreciate the others, George, if I do not estimate all at their worth?"

"Frank, what do you think of—I mean, do you not see—has it ever struck you, there is a resemblance between the aunt and the niece?"

"I did not know Mrs. Spooner possessed an aunt; she is old enough to be her own aunt."

"Mrs. Joscelyn, my dear fellow—I mean Mrs. Joscelyn and her niece."

"Of course there is a great likeness in their characters, and will be more so as Miss Daintree grows older."

"I wonder you did not fall in love with her, Frank."

"She is too young for me, I have known her from a child."

"Do you think she would make a good wife?"

"It is quite impossible for her to be otherwise. She carries her warranty in her face."

"I think, Frank—I have been thinking a good deal to-day. I really think I must marry soon."

"I would not think about it, George, any more—I would do it."

"By Jove! I will. Thank you, Frank; I am very much obliged to you, Frank."

"My advice is more palatable than King Crab's."

"Ugh! I hate him! How could we be such fools as to be led by him, to come to this odious spot!"

"Treason! treason! I will write every word you say in the journal."

"Do so; for, if you don't, I shall do it myself."





CHAPTER XIV.

"LUFF IT IS."

THE sagacity of the reader will no doubt readily comprehend that the ladies had arrived at that crisis of apathetic dulness which gives history nothing to record. They were departing when we left them, for Exe church, with the determination of staying at Exe over the afternoon service.

They shed a few more tears over the sad records of the drowned, and they collected some very interesting stories regarding not only those who were mourned, but of the mourners themselves.

On certain anniversaries, a lady and gentleman came down to Exe, and spent a sad vigil over a tomb, that recorded the names of two young girls, fifteen and sixteen years of age, drowned on their way home from school. They were the only children of this couple.

"Year by year," said the old fisherman, who had talked to them the Sunday before, "they do cum punktivel, and they do sit o' that there stone be the hour, and ivery year as they do cum they luiks holder and sadder nor the year afore. They be a'most so haged and feeble this year, as we do think has they wonner cum agin. They will be gone to where their little lassies is awaitin' on 'im. They is most miserable to see, to be sure. There wor an uncommon fine man, as did cum where a stone wor pit hover a pratty young critter, fund wi' a babby in her airms. And arter that we niver saw him more, until, may be, sax weeks agone. He wor a deal stouter, but I knowed him at oncest, by rason he wor a very fine man, and stepped remarkable. There wor a leddy wi' him, and twa slips o' lassies, and he tuk 'em straight over all the mounds, to that there grave of the young critter and her babby. And to be sure, he wor choked wi' big sobs, and the

leddy had her eyes brimming wi' tears. And she pit her hond kindly on him, and says she,—

“‘She will be my sister in heaven, Robert.’

“And wi' that he wrung her hand, but a couldn't speak. And if ye please, Mum, this wor the second wife, and her childer, and I'm thinking she wor a good womman, and didn't begrudge the first wife, the pretty fair young critter drowned wi' her babby in her airms, the big sobs as wor busting the heart of that foine man. We made bould as to be werry respectful to that there koind-arted second wife, please, Mum.”

The ladies might have gone on listening to the old man all day, he went from one story into another, but the church bells warned him and them that they must go and take their seats in the church.

Perhaps they were a little sad, remembering the excitement of the last Sunday. They each took the same places they had occupied then, so that there was room between Kate and Mrs. Joscelyn for another person. It is to be feared that Kate spent the few moments they had to spare before the service began, in conjectures as to whether she should ever see that handsome face, those kindly beaming eyes looking down into hers again, as they sang together out of the same book.

Her conjectures were answered at once; the pew door opened, Colonel Erne walked in, and took, as if it was his place by right, the vacant seat between Mrs. Joscelyn and Miss Daintree.

No veil in the world could hide the rising blushes that covered the pretty face of the Rosebud. Albeit she never raised her eyes, and could only tell by his boots that her secret question had been answered. But the blushes kept going and coming all through the service; and when the time came for singing a hymn, he took the book and found the place. Not one in the pew seemed to think it necessary to give Kate a hymn-book.

And now was enacted one of those simple deeds by which the settling of a momentous question takes place. An act, scarcely noticed by others, almost too frivolous to be recorded, but which was evidently looked for by one of the parties as that act which was to decide his fate, and was given by the other as the token that she accepted the decision of that fate.

Colonel Erne rose almost the first in the pew, as the singing began. He did not offer the use of his hymn-book

to Miss Daintree, but he looked at her. Her eyelashes flashed up for a moment, she caught the look, she nestled to his side, and held out her hand to hold her side of the book.

Then did his eyes droop, as much to hide a scintillation of joy in them, that might have startled the congregation, as to gaze on a treasure he now considered his own. It appeared as if, without a word, with scarcely a sign, these two hearts had decided to be interested evermore in each other. She had responded silently to his unasked question, and at once he took possession of her. He had now the right to single her out from among her companions, as his peculiar care. He had but scant means of showing his privilege in a pew in church. Nevertheless, he did not lose one—he found her places in the prayer-book. It was his pleasure to consider that she required them found for her, and it seemed her pleasure so to have them found. He was most particular in adjusting her hassock; he took her veil, just falling from her bonnet, folded it, and put it into his pocket. He laid hands upon her little glove, just laid aside for a moment, and kept it in his during the whole of the sermon. Finally, on coming out of church, he put her prayer-book into his pocket, carried her parasol, and offered her his arm as they left the church-door.

As they sat on the sea-shore, eating their luncheon, he thus explained his sudden arrival to Mrs. Joscelyn:

"I intended to stick faithfully to the admiral all through his cruise, and not returning here till next Sunday; when, his duties being over, he would be free to come with me, and see the end of this famous challenge. But I received a letter from head-quarters yesterday, offering me a command, which will take me from England for three years. It is not exactly the command I should like, or that is in a manner due to my services; but it is the first thing the Horse Guards have had to offer me, therefore I am grateful. They know at head-quarters that I am not fond of an idle life, and that probably I might prefer accepting the offer, rather than stay doing nothing at home. But sometimes there occur periods in a soldier's life when a spell at home is absolutely necessary to him. He should have some private ties as well as public ties. I shall not lose any caste in their eyes if I refuse. The admiral and I discussed the whole matter, and the end of it is, you see me here. Say, shall I go, or wait and see the end of the challenge?"

"That will be over long before you sail," said Clara.

"Perhaps—but still, shall I go or stay?"

Nobody said a word.

Mrs. Joscelyn because she was astonished. That the acquaintance of but a few hours should put such power into their hands, argued but one thing. And how dare she pronounce upon so important a matter in this sudden fashion?

Mrs. Spooner was silent from astonishment also. Her thoughts not being so sagacious as Mrs. Joscelyn's, only made her wonder still greater. Never quite able to divest herself of a personal interest in anything that was said or done, she had only sufficient strength of mind to felicitate herself in secret that she had put her best bonnet on.

Clara gazed eagerly, inquiringly, into his face. Her clear head and sensitive heart divined the inference that was to be drawn by the question put, the reply given. He had a restless quickness in his eyes, they wandered from one face to the other, passing over, as a gallant gentleman should, the flushing, paling face of her gossip. Clara turned for a moment to regard her—only for a moment—and then, smiling with joyous look, exclaimed,

"Stay, oh! do stay!"

"Thanks," he said fervently; "I had settled to stay just two seconds before you spoke."

So no more was said.

He passed the whole of the day with them, not embarrassing the little Rosebud by any singular attentions, beyond sitting by her side, at evening service, singing with her out of the same book, and listening to all she said, as lovers listen to nightingales.

Set at ease by this judicious behaviour, the pretty little girlish thing emerged out of her throbbing state of shyness and reserve, into that of a quiet and serene happiness, that imparted to her a beauty that delighted them all.

As we have said before, there was not a rosebud in any garden ever more sweet and lovely to look upon than this dainty little creature. But now, it seemed as if the sun had kissed and blessed her, and bid her be a bud no more, but bloom out into a rose, as lovely as the dawn.

She had found her destiny, and rested well content with the glimpse she had of what it was to be.

Oh! sweet heart, gushing over with a joy that neither earth nor air can produce the like! What sight is there that can equal in purity and beauty the first dawn of love in a young girl's heart.

But "goodness gracious !" as says our dear Spooner, what business has sentiment to do with a matter-of-fact story such as this is ?

Let us go back to realities. All that we have been recording in the last two pages is almost stated upon presumption. It will be a sad thing if it has all to be unsaid, and to discover that the colonel was, after all, only "philandering."

But still, Miss Daintree, as we know, dear reader, has another string to her bow. We may as well let her indulge all her flights of fancy, now she has begun to feel what love is.

"Solitude," Zimmerman tells us, "breeds all sorts of humours in us."

Perhaps it was owing to their dull life at Luff that Miss Daintree so suddenly—but, I forgot, Miss Daintree never allowed it was dull. To this day, she repeats it was and ever will be the most delicious period of her life. Truly it may be so now, for the colonel rows them home. The colonel does not land at Luff, but he sits in the boat, and is waited on by ever so many kind hands. One brings him tea, another sugar, a third the cream—in fact, the giving him merely one cup of tea took up nearly two hours.

The colonel thought that tea so good, that he came early in the morning and had another cup.

The colonel took three of the ladies for a row in his boat. The colonel brought them in the evening a dish of fish. Moreover, he had another cup of tea.

And this continued until the Thursday morning, when the fates ordered him to go to London.

Fates are so inexorable in their orders.

In the early part of this history, it is recorded as a fact, for she said it with her own lips, that Miss Daintree loved "flirting."

She was having quite a dose of it, and at Luff, too, where they were under a sort of solemn engagement to hold no intercourse with any male thing, but Spitz, the lap-dog.

If the ladies had not now infringed the rules and regulations of the challenge, I should like to know who had. As the gentlemen had discussed their broken vows on dining ashore, the ladies now wondered how far they were culpable in admitting the visits and friendly attentions of a gentleman, even though he never landed on their island.

If his boat could speak, how many hours would it not

tell the ladies had floated about in her, accompanied by a gentleman !

Grieved as I was to have it to record that the gentlemen made up their minds to say nothing about their "lapses," unless, as the squire bargained, his wife should ask him point-blank, I have now to tell, which I do with blushing pen, that the ladies made no reservation at all.

They agreed not to mention one syllable of all this tea-drinking, boat-flirting, and goings on. Mrs. Joscelyn did not even say, "If my husband asks me ;" or rather she did say, "if I am asked—I shall say nothing."

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

As if to punish the ladies for this base conduct, all that Thursday evening a great cloud kept gathering about him still larger and blacker clouds, until the one side of heaven presented a phalanx of awful grandeur, that made the wicked, the perjured, the false, shudder to look at.

So of course our ladies shuddered.

Mrs. Joscelyn shuddered lest so great a storm was brewing, that their rickety house, grand in appearance, but most fragile in reality, might be blown over their heads.

Mrs. Spooner shuddered because she feared if the sea arose it might swallow up the island of Puff. Bessie comforted her by saying that the island of Puff—properly called Puffin in ancient maps—had existed time immemorial, and it was not likely to be expunged from the face of the globe this particular month in which they inhabited it.

"But such strange things do happen, now a-days, Bessie, dear !"

"I think," responded Bessie, "it will be too strange to occur."

Clara shuddered because the howling and sighing of the wind, as it gathered from all quarters in sullen moans and hurrying blasts, reminded her of the night she was orphaned and homeless.

Kate shuddered because "somebody" might be in danger. She did not specify who was that somebody, but everybody took it for granted she meant the whole world now on the water. So she was allowed to shudder a good deal.

Bessie did not shudder at all, and Susan thought "noffin of winds a-roring of theyselves hout o' breath," so much as, "that they 'ood leave hoff they pranks" in time for the boat to come and replenish their stores.

Now, the four ladies, we know, had reason to shudder for

their sins, without giving any reason for their fears. But it is of no use wasting time discussing their delinquencies—the storm came. It was furious !

They had to put up the shutters in the daytime to prevent the windows being blown in. They dare not go to bed, because they did not like to separate. They improvised couches, and lay all huddled together, as if their weight would keep the house in its place, and prevent it being bodily blown away.

They could only light one fire, and that was in a little back kitchen, whose chimney was a little funnel, sheltered in a corner of the house, so that the wind never found it out. They had to sit many hours in the dark, because the candles were getting short.

Daisy, the cow, lowed dismally, adding to their fear. They would like to have brought her too into the drawing-room, where Runa and Spitz were already kennelled, but Clara and Susan together, with infinite difficulty, and getting wet through, contrived to tie her up in the coal-hole, where she ate up the hay that was to last her a week, that very night.

So she was obliged to be let loose in the morning to go to seek her food, which she did among the new flower-beds—cropping up with her succulent tongue all the pretty plants and shrubs they had imported and planted with such care.

It rained with such impetuosity, power, and perseverance, that they began to think the sea had got up into the sky, or that the rain was determined to drown the sea.

Many slates having been blown off the roof, they were almost obliged to sit under umbrellas, for the rain poured down everywhere. They went about in waterproof-cloaks, and kept their goloshes handy, excepting when these goloshes went swimming away on a little voyage of their own.

On Saturday evening there was a lull of a few hours, during which time a pale dripping sun attempted to dry up the world.

Mrs. Joscelyn urged them all to exert themselves to warm and fumigate the house. They opened every door and window, lighted large fires, dried all their damp things, drank oceans of hot tea, and were just getting merry and lively again, when a roaring sound was heard in the distance; they hastily got the doors closed, and the window-shutters up, when down it came, and shook the house with a

dreadful power, that made them all pallid with fear. How it ever "kept its feet," as Susan said, they did not know, for the storm seemed to have returned, as the parable saith, "with seven spirits more wicked than itself." They appeared to howl round the unfortunate house, only built for pleasure, as if their sole business was to hurl it to the ground. They gathered together, as if trying to lift the roof, when suddenly, with a whirling and tumultuous roar, they would battle at every window like an army of besiegers, and roll off again in sullen roars, like the growlings of angry demons. It was impossible to sleep, to rest, to do anything; and they could have no help, for no boat could live in such a sea.

And now came little privations in the way of food. Unlike the gentlemen, they had hitherto feasted royally. But it was absolutely necessary to give Daisy the last of their vegetables. Then, with a view to take what was easiest prepared, they had indulged in tea or coffee, instead of regular dinner, which, indeed, it was, as nothing else could be cooked; and so their sugar was all gone, and the tea getting lamentably short.

Every now and then they were cheated into fancying there was a lull in the storm, when the winds would come back, whispering at the keyholes like ghosts; then becoming peevish and angry, at last, in raging fury, they would send down a slanting shower of rain, that seemed to pierce the air like long polished spears. And as if that was not enough, they would rend the cloud asunder, whiten the ground with hail, and whirl it off in clattering bursts of thunder. Altogether, they mutually agreed that never had they known such a storm, or one to last so long a time.

It was on Sunday afternoon that the clouds, covering the earth like a tent-roof, began to roll themselves up and float away. One or two large heavy ones seemed pulled aside like curtains by the wind, which was still rioting up in the heavens. And before they went, they shed a cataract of rain on the already half drowned earth. But at last they were all gone, and by the time the stars were beginning to peep timidly out, the clouds were as filmy as cobwebs, but torn into every fantastic remnant.

The wind began to sigh like a troubled heart, as if sorrowful for the wild ruin it had spread, and as it sighed it died away in little gushes of tears.

Gently and solemnly rose the pale and quiet moon, edged with a pearly rim; and as she gazed down on the heaving sea, cleft into caverns, and rising into tumultuous snow-capped

hills, the great ocean seemed to tremble with love of her beauty, and strove to calm his wild rage.

And there was rest and peace that night in the Palace of Luffi.

The day broke over the sea calm and soft, clad in grey, like a pilgrim. Was it mourning for those who had not lived to see it rise?

The tender-hearted girls could not but think that there might be more tombstones added to the sad number already filling the churchyard at Exe—added because of this storm, which was to be registered evermore in their lives as an epoch, a time that could never be forgotten.

Mrs. Spooner, exhausted by her fears and privations, was in bed. Mrs. Joscelyn was assisting Susan to look over the stores, for it must be two days at least before they could expect a boat to come to them.

The waves were still rolling into the bay mountains high, and it must be that time before the sea would settle down, so as to permit a boat to come with any safety. And, if it should take a longer period, they must be prepared to husband their resources, at all events.

Mrs. Joscelyn looked grave, and Susan aghast, at the little they had left of everything but meat. One loaf of bread, a few handfuls of flour, a reasonable quantity of rice, no vegetables, no tea, no sugar. Fortunately they had both honey and preserves.

"Now, Susan," said Mrs. Joscelyn, "what we shall require most is bread. You have some ground rice, and a few potatoes, and arrowroot. Boil the potatoes, run them through the wire sieve, and mix them with all the flour you have, the ground rice and arrowroot. Anything else that you can add, pray do."

"We hev a tin of paternt flour for rolls, Mum."

"The best thing in the world. Join that with the others, and make as many loaves out of it as you can. It will be odd bread; but it is the best you can make. Any eggs?"

"Not a shell, Mum. Mussus Spooner hev been a-heving hof 'em beat hup in wine, Mum, most twice a day."

"Then roast the piece of beef."

"I hev plenty o' horse-radish, Mum!" interrupted Susan, triumphantly.

"Very good; and give us a milky rice pudding."

"Where be the shuggar, Mum?"

"Honey will do."

Susan was one of those characters who have certain laws

and rules for everything. She was peculiar about her rice puddings, for which she had a name.

"Honey, Mum! how be I to know how much honey ool do?"

"You must guess."

"A tay-spune, may be?"

"Yes—a teaspoonful."

"Or a tay-coop?"

"No; that is too much."

"I can't go for to do it, Mum, without I knows dizactly."

"Nonsense, Susan—don't tease me with your whims!"

Now, Mrs. Joscelyn had said precisely what Susan desired. She was ripe for a fit of ill-humour, and only wanted an excuse to indulge in one.

"Tease you, Mum! Well, when I teases my Missus, hit's time as my Missus and me should part. Tease you, Mum!—ho! that's it!"

"Don't be foolish, Susan, but go on with your work."

And Mrs. Joscelyn left the kitchen with a heightened colour, evidently seriously displeased.

And well she might. It was an unlooked-for finale of the dreadful storm in the elements that had alarmed, almost appalled them, to have a tea-cup storm in the kitchen. Mrs. Joscelyn was conscious how slender was the safeguard between them and a most pitiable, exposed, dangerous condition; and was still overflowing with gratitude to the Almighty, who had "stilled the winds and the tempest." She was vexed that anyone under her charge should forget the feelings proper for such a time, and think only of her own tempers and follies.

But, alas! Mrs. Joscelyn's lament over the ill-timed petulance of one of her subjects was not the only thing to be deplored.

Susan, blind with anger, forgot that crockery is not iron, and crack went the milk-jug, the only one, with the force with which she thumped it on the table.

"Jest as if yer couldn't hae minded yersel better nor that!" she exclaimed to the unconscious fragments, as she picked them up, and threw them, with an angry jerk, into the fire.

They fell into a basin of bread and milk, just boiling up for Miss Bessie's use.

"Ugh! ye baste, coom oot of that!"

And she dashed the contents of the pan into a basin that she saw, too late, contained the ground rice that was to help to eke out their bread. Aware of the consequences of this

disaster, she hastily tried to arrest the progress of the boiling milk, which caused it, in the rebound, to spirkle up into her face, and scald her painfully. In her agony, away went the pan to the other end of the kitchen, and, as evil hap would have it, it alighted on the bag of flour, and poured itself out upon the last hope of bread they had.

Susan, blind with pain, saw not this terrible misfortune, otherwise her susceptible feelings as a cook would have overcome her bodily pangs as a woman. It was only when, attracted by her cries, her mistress ran in to see what could be the matter, that this catastrophe was discovered.

It cured Susan in a minute. She bathed her scalded face with cold water, would not hear of applying the last of the flour as a remedy, begged her mistress's pardon, and set to work to slave like a horse, to make amends. She refused to be comforted and consoled by the sight of a whole tin of captains' biscuits unopened.

Her mistress had ordered bread, and bread they should have! How she managed it is only known to Susan herself; but at tea there appeared a large and beautiful loaf of new bread. Of course they ate but sparingly of it, taking each just sufficient to "compliment" Susan, as they phrased it, and made biscuits do the rest of the work.

When Mrs. Joscelyn went into the kitchen after tea, to express her approbation of Susan's efforts, she found that penitent individual imitating the storm—the violence of her fit of temper was going off in a good cry.

Knowing the efficacy of the remedy, Mrs. Joscelyn returned to her companions, feeling much comforted in the idea that she had now only one more week to pass at Puff; that the worst that could happen to them was now past, and that, without flattering herself too much, she had reasonable hopes they should keep the peace towards each other, so nearly touching the goal of their hopes. It was almost beyond the bounds of probability that they should now require to raise the flag for help, and it was nearly as impossible that for this short period she and her companions should quarrel and separate.

With a light heart and a buoyant step, her face a true index of the lovely sunset, Mrs. Joscelyn entered the room. She always brought a sort of sunshine with her, but all were attracted by the sweet smile and serene happiness now expressed on it.

"Has the boat come?" asked Clara.

"Or the gentlemen?" murmured Mrs. Spooner, looking very much washed out.

"Or ——" began Kate, and stopped abruptly, blushing scarlet.

"No—no—no," answered Mrs. Joscelyn, turning to each. "I was merely thinking this was our last week. I am afraid I shall have to record in the journal that I am glad."

Mrs. Spooner instantly burst into a flood of tears; Clara coloured with indignation; Kate looked up in dismay; while Miss Bessie openly exclaimed—

"Oh! mamma, how wicked of you!"

"I—I did not th—think after all—all I had tri—tried to do-o-o-o-o," sobbed Mrs. Spooner, "to-o please you, th—that you—you—you ——" here her feelings became too strong for speech.

Now, will it be believed that Mrs. Joscelyn, after one moment's dismay, began to laugh!

"Do you know," she said, "I was thus happy because I was felicitating myself that we had passed the worst ill we could have? We were not likely to quarrel and separate the last week, and that, therefore, our trial was virtually over—we had nothing more to fear. If the boat comes on Wednesday, it is quite impossible we should have any want that would oblige us to hoist the flag for help. Do you not understand? That is why I am glad."

"Did you anticipate that we should hoist the flag?" asked Clara.

"I have had a presentiment that we should do so before we left, which was so strong that I really dreaded it. The reason I laugh now is, that I thought it impossible we should quarrel in this short space, and, before my thoughts had fled, see how I offended you all, how very near we are to having a serious misunderstanding."

"You must allow," began Mrs. Spooner, "we had reason."

"Yes, you had reason—will that content you? I expressed myself badly. I apologise."

The queen was kissed by all her subjects in token of forgiveness, and, in a very short time, they were all absolutely expressing the same sentiments as herself, viz., they were glad this was the last week, and not all, I lament to say, from similar feelings. There was an under-current of private wishes and hopes, of which it is just as well to say nothing at present.

"How quickly a quarrel can be hatched and brewed!" observed Clara, as they were all seated round the fire

about nine o'clock in the evening, Bessie having retired to bed.

Though they had a fire, the windows were all open. Never was there seen or felt a more lovely and delicious night.

"Yes; and how true is the text, 'A soft answer turneth away wrath.'"

"And how quickly you said it, Mrs. Joscelyn."

"If one has to apologise, 'tis best to do it at once, Arabella. All my life I have found the advantage of an immediate frankness, a sort of tearing aside the motives of a quarrel. They generally have such random beginnings, they will not easily bear investigation."

"I have heard it rumoured," said Clara, "that you and Mr. Joscelyn would not have been married, had it not been for your openness and faith in each other."

"I daresay Mr. Summers told you that. Well, it is entirely against my feelings as a woman to show up another woman, but I will tell you my little tale if you wish it."

"Oh! of all things, nothing we should like better."

"Then, pray do me the favour to imagine I am improvising a story for your amusement, and dismiss it from your minds as reality. In the first place, you will readily agree to this when you hear it, as it is almost impossible to believe such a strange mind should be possessed by a human being. 'Truth is stranger than fiction.' I am only sorry that it is a woman who is to exemplify this truism in my story."

"Oh! don't say that. I know a woman, a girl at my school, I believe she was capable of anything—murder, even!"

"Let us have your story after Mrs. Joscelyn's?" asked Clara of Mrs. Spooner.

MRS. JOSCELYN'S STORY.

"I do not intend to treat you with the particulars of my earliest years, because in the first place, they were pretty much like other people's, I fancy; and in the second, I cannot recall anything that would in the least interest you.

"My father married twice. He had two sons by his first wife, the eldest of whom is Kate's father. He had an only daughter by his second wife, which daughter is myself. My father and mother are both alive, and I never see them without thanking God that they are so. They make one in love with old age.

"No youthful lover, that ever I saw, equals in tender and gallant devotion my dear old father to his dear old wife; and no girl, with devoted heart and womanly goodness, ever loved a man with more ardour and self-abnegation than my old mother loves my old father. They are quite a picture to see, and a lesson to witness. You are not to infer that they are foolishly fond—on the contrary, they show the high consideration they have for each other by a courtesy and high breeding that subjects offer to sovereigns.

"Each is the sovereign of the other. At the same time, they do not always think alike. My father indulges in political opinions of so strong a liberal tendency, he borders upon Radicalism. My mother is the sweetest little vixen of a Tory you ever met. So, when they have a dispute about the welfare of the country, my father advocates his principles with little sugared deprecations, such as :—

"My dearest life must forgive the thoughts that will arise when I am so unfortunate as to lose her company for an hour!"

"To which my mother would reply :—

"I forgive the thoughts, dear love, but can scarcely pardon the lips that permitted their expression."

"Then answers my father :—

"Place your dear finger on them, and they will not open under the soft touch!"

"I would rather that you would be convinced by what I say."

"Say on, then. I am glad I am at present unconvinced, so that I may sit and be convinced by you."

"And all this was in real earnest. They never had a dispute, but as to which should give way to the other. Brought up in hearing and seeing such examples, I could not help a natural serenity of mind becoming my chief characteristic. There was nothing to annoy, no incident to jar the pleasant social feelings of youth. My brothers appeared to think it their highest privilege to have the care of their sister. Never were there people so attached to each other as my brothers and me.

"It was on the occasion of the marriage of my eldest brother that I first met Mr. Joscelyn. He was introduced to me as a gentleman who wished to dance, but who was afraid to venture into the intricacies of a quadrille without a good-natured partner to help him through it.

"So I brought him to you, my dear," continued the lady

who was introducing us, and who was the bride's mother 'because I heard your brother say he had never seen you out of temper in his life !'

"I laughed, and answered :—

"People cannot lose their temper when there is nothing to provoke them."

"Oh !" said Mr. Joscelyn, 'I shall soon do that. I am so awkward, but you may scold me as much as you like, for I shall always be able to say I was the first that ever provoked Miss Daintree !'

"If that is a matter of consequence, I will do my best to confer the distinction upon you !'

"Let us take our places, then. I am all impatience to win the honour."

"But we did not dance together, as it happened. A little sister of the bride's, about twelve or fourteen years of age, came by, exclaiming piteously :—

"Oh, dear ! how I want to dance, and no one will ask me !'

"My partner and I exchanged looks.

"If I read your eyes rightly, Miss Daintree, they say, go and ask the poor child to dance !'

"Yes, that is what they say. Take her for your partner instead of me."

"But suppose I say I won't ?'

"Then you will gain your end—I shall be provoked."

"I will put off provoking you to another time, and I will go and ask the child, on one condition, namely, that you remain at hand to coach me through my steps."

"This I promised, and he soon returned with the child, whose little sad face was now radiant and smiling.

"I am sure," she whispered to me, 'nobody has got such a handsome partner as I have. He is so tall I am obliged to go on tiptoe to reach his hands.'

"While he was equally confidential, coming up to tell me what 'our child,' as he called her, said and did. When the dance was over, he whispered,

"I don't regret the sacrifice. We made our child happy. I got through my paces pretty well, thanks to you, and I had you to talk to whenever I pleased, and that, I can tell you, was always."

"There was something so frank, and out of the common, in Mr. Joscelyn, I could not help being very much attracted by him ; and then he was, as you know, a very fine-looking young man. As I looked at him, grouped among other

gentlemen, he always seemed like Saul—a head and shoulders above his fellows.

“And I noticed that everyone liked to have a word with him. But our intercourse stopped here suddenly, for my youngest brother had met with an accident which obliged him to be very careful of his health ; and I returned home with him the day after the wedding.

“I could not help thinking of Mr. Joscelyn very often, especially when I was taking long, solitary walks. A girl dying of consumption lived about three miles from our house, and I was in the habit of going to see her constantly. As the time of her release from pain and suffering drew near, she asked me, as a favour, if I would be with her at the last ; and this, I need not say, I promised, though with some dread. No matter at what hour she chose to send for me—I would come.

“It has always seemed strange to me, the event that grew out of that promise. It was the means, and, as far as we could judge, the only means, that brought about a second meeting, with all its consequences, between me and my dear John.

“The poor girl had sent her summons to me ; I received it, just as there was beginning to dawn on the earth one of those long summer days, that make one think of Paradise.

“The clock was only striking three as I crept down-stairs, anxious not to disturb my father and mother. As I opened the front door, I was reminded of Milton’s description of morning :—

‘ Now morn, her rosy steps in th’ Eastern clime
Advancing, sowed the earth with orient pearls.’

“Never was any scene so fair, so fresh, so fragrant, as the newly-awakened earth, rousing herself and her subjects to the duties of the day.

“But few birds had begun to twitter ; a rabbit now and then ran across my path, sitting down on its little white tail, to consider, within its little rabbit brains, what I was ; for never, in all its small experience, had it met with anything like me at that hour of the morning, and it was therefore more astonished than alarmed.

“But I could only notice these things hastily, for I did not dare delay.

“I am not going to enter into the details of a scene so solemn

as a death-bed. God gives us our moments for meditation upon a subject that is daily typified to us in sleep ; and we ought therefore each to know what feelings befit such a time. I will only say that death, in the case of this poor girl, came with such gentle touch, such serene peace and joy, that we, surrounding her when the angels came and bore away her soul, could have said to each other—'May I die the death of the righteous, and may my last end be like hers.'

"It was not much more than five o'clock still, in the early morning, when I set out from the cottage to return home—for she lived but twenty minutes after my arrival—and I thought I was only in the way of her people, and of no further use to her. I had reached the foot of the mountain, still full of thoughts half solemn, half sorrowful, when I came to a foot-bridge that crossed one of the prettiest mountain streams that ever a painter saw.

"The sight of its sparkling water urged me to stop, and bathe my tear-stained face in it. I had no right to weep for a pure spirit gone home ; but at my age a natural feeling of regret for the sudden closing of a youthful life, drew forth my tears in spite of myself.

"I knew I might linger on my road—I had ample time before me to perform all my little home duties before my father and mother appeared down-stairs. So I sat down and played with the brook as with a plaything, while my thoughts soared after the spirit just gone from earth.

"Our village clock was striking six, when I heard a step coming along the turnpike road. Properly he ought (for it was a man) to have gone straight on, but I heard him coming through the bushes down to the water. I arose to go on my way, and found myself face to face with Mr. Joscelyn. He flushed up to the very roots of his hair, and his eyes sparkled with a great joy.

"'Do you know,' he said at once, 'where I am going? I am going to Africa, because—because I could not find you.'

"'I have been at home,' I stammered.

"'But not all the time.'

"'No.'

"'I heard you were married—are you married?'

"'No ; but is this the way to Africa?'

"'I shall not go to Africa now—at least, not to-day. I shall walk home with you, if you will permit me.'

"'A much more sensible plan, I think.'

“I have been very restless ever since I saw you, and I cannot sleep at night, nor settle to anything, unless I take long walks every day. I was persuaded by a friend three weeks ago to join him in an expedition to the Cape to shoot everything we see—Kaffirs included, I suppose. He has gone to London to make all the necessary arrangements; he went in an orthodox manner, by train. I said I would just stretch my legs a bit about the country, that I might not wholly lose the use of them when confined to the deck of a ship. I have been through half a dozen counties, and this morning took the fancy to stride across this county in a day, and so started at three in the morning. Hearing the bubbling of the brook, I came down, as is my custom with every fresh spring I meet, to taste it. It was my cousin who told me you were married, or about to marry, and that is why I thought to stride through your country without stopping in it. Do you always walk at this hour !”

“I told him the reason of my being there then.

“Ah ! I see ; the same thing over again—you were doing a kindness. That is what I admired so much in you, Miss Daintree—I mean about the little girl, you know, that wanted to dance that night. I would rather have danced with you, you know, by a good deal. But I could not stand your look. “Hang me !” said I to myself, “if I like giving up dancing with this girl, standing by her, taking her hand, twirling her round—all so pleasant—but her eyes say I must do it, so I’ll e’en take the child.” I hope you are not offended with my frankness, Miss Daintree. For the life of me I cannot help saying what I feel.”

“I like it, if you please. I think only insincere people fear frankness.”

“Exactly my opinion ; I don’t wish to offend—in fact, I would rather cut my tongue out than offend you, and so I hope you will remember this, whatever I may happen to say.”

“You know you engaged to provoke me.”

“Ha ! you remember that. I am more glad to hear you say you remember the little that passed between us than if I had shot the biggest elephant in Africa. It shows that you have some interest in me. I go a good deal about the world—I have seen a great many girls, and have admired them, and all that, but as for remembering anything about them the next day, I assure you, they might never have been born for anything I cared. But with you ——”

"Here we are at home, and I suppose I may conclude that you will stay and breakfast with my father and mother.'

"I shall be only too delighted. In fact, if there is a man in the world I want to see, it is your father.'

"He will make his appearance down in this study at eight o'clock, so will you take a seat in that comfortable chair, as it wants an hour and a half to that time, and take ——'

"A nap?—of course I will; you see I understand all you wish to say by merely looking in your face.'

"And I really believe he obeyed me so thoroughly, he was asleep in a minute. As for me, I went up-stairs, and sat down in my own room. For the first time I had been face to face with death. For the first time I felt what makes life so blest.

"You must understand I was not what you call 'in love.' But I knew that I should have to ask my heart if I would accept this frank-hearted, handsome young fellow for my husband, and that my heart would certainly say 'yes.' I argued with myself why I had this conviction—for it was a conviction—and the only answer I could give myself was, 'that his own sudden liking for me roused in my heart the same feeling for himself.' I settled it was fate.

"You must remember I had so much love given me by my own people, that the ordinary love-making of the present day was never of that ardent, or I should say, unequivocal kind, to rouse my interest. Whatever of incipient flirtations had hitherto passed between me and my swains, died out for want of the little breeze that was to rustle it into a flame. I was considered cold-hearted by some, too sensible by others, again too clever, when all the while I was merely an ordinary, lively, matter-of-fact girl, quite ready to give my love when I knew it was valued.

"So this irrepressible fancy for me, of Mr. Joscelyn's, was just the thing to please me. Moreover, he was, to my taste, so handsome. As he appeared through the bushes, and stood transfixed before me, he was as fine a specimen of the human race as eyes ever lit on. Though merely dressed in a better sort of gamekeeper's dress, with a knapsack on his shoulder, hot with walking, his neckerchief removed, and his throat open, he was as a king among men. He was a gentleman in every sense of the word, and looked it. He had such a beautiful fresh colour, his cheek was so rosy; his brow so fair; his curls so crisp and picturesque; the sparkle in his eyes so good, so frank, expressive of such health in body and

mind, that it was impossible not to say to oneself—‘Perfect as is the outside of this mortal, the spirit must match it, all seems so healthily pure!’ Thus you will see that though I was something like Juliet—

“‘I looked to like, and looking—liking moved!’

I yet could reason.

“My father and mother were greatly taken with his appearance; but before breakfast was half over they could easily see into every corner of his heart. My mother drew me aside, when we arose from the table, and said :—

“‘My dear, you have made a sudden conquest, and one that seems as sincere as if grounded on the acquaintance of years. There are some characters that require little announcement—they speak for themselves. I should say Mr. Joscelyn is one of that sort. But all the more because he is so sincere and straightforward, should he be dealt with frankly.’

“‘Yes, mamma,’ I answered, shyly.

“‘I do not think a refusal would kill him, Lizzy, or that he would mourn all his life if it was given at once. But keep him in suspense, and refuse him at last, he will take very ill indeed. He will revenge himself on the whole sex!’

“‘I agree with you, mamma.’

“‘Then, my dear, be prepared for some communication, and let your answer be yea or nay.’

“I thought this rather hard of mamma, though, at the same time, I fancied she was correct in her expectation. I thought it hard, because I fancied I should like to be courted a little before I pledged myself. You see we girls have but a short time to show our power, and we do not like to lose it.”

“Very true, Mrs. Joscelyn. Do you know I am delighted to hear you were just like any other person. I have always had a fear of you, from being so superior to these sorts of trifles.”

“I am not superior at all, and they are not trifles. I am just like any other woman who intends to do her duty in the world as well as she can. You will be just the same, Arabella, when the challenge is over, and we go home.”

Arabella had the grace to shake her head doubtfully, while she answered—

“You have such a good temper!”

"And where is yours? What is to prevent you having one just the same as mine?"

"True," answered Arabella, without knowing why she vouched thus for the fact; but with an inward conviction that, as she had allowed it, she must act accordingly, and fit herself with a good temper somehow, from somewhere. It would henceforth be expected of her to be sweet-tempered.

"Pray go on, Mrs. Joscelyn!" pleaded Clara. "I have read many love stories, and heard of them, but such an instantaneous one as yours, with its accompaniments, I never had a glimpse of in all my life."

"I have often thought it was rather odd; but I comforted myself by thinking that the great master painter of life, Shakespeare, gave us an example in 'Romeo and Juliet.' But you are not to understand that Mr. Joscelyn proposed that day, and was accepted by me. No, notwithstanding my mother's opinion of his impetuosity, he did nothing of the sort.

"He told my father that he was greatly smitten with me, and thinking it was a man's duty to marry who could afford to keep a wife, it was his intention to marry. But that it was a serious and solemn undertaking, and while he would not pronounce marriage vows without faithfully trying to carry them out, yet he would not like to engage any young woman to promise anything for him until she knew all his faults and failings. He had tried to get an introduction to the family soon after he had met me at the wedding of my eldest brother, but had failed to obtain what he considered an efficient one.

"He had no father and mother, but had been brought up by an uncle, who had an only daughter, which daughter he had taken into his confidence, she being a sort of sister to him. He had employed her to find out some means for obtaining him an opportunity of coming to this county; and just as he thought he had succeeded, this cousin wrote to tell him Miss Daintree was engaged, if not already married, to a Mr. Summers."

("Frank!" exclaimed a voice, involuntarily.)

"No, a connection of his; but the authority was good, as our Frank Summers was always at Tillwen Hall, where lived Mr. Joscelyn's uncle.

"So, in disgust, he suddenly closed with the African scheme, as, to use his own phrase, he said—

"He did not wonder at a! the world wanting to marry that girl."

"This report being now proved false, and he having obtained his introduction in the chance way described, he confided in my father, as I have stated, and begged permission to take up his abode somewhere near our home, that he might devote himself to the task of making Miss Daintree acquainted with all his sins and weaknesses before he proposed to her.

"My father was highly delighted with this honourable conduct, and my mother loved him at once as a son.

"As for me, I gave him very soon reason to think he would not be refused when he proposed ; but having fixed a stated time in his own mind for that purpose, he did not swerve from it by so much as a minute.

"I shall not tell you what that period was, but merely say that having engaged us to walk to the little wooden bridge crossing the brook where we met that morning, he having gone off fishing there, and we bringing his luncheon, we reached it, and saw him perched on a stone busily casting his fly.

"My mother sat down on the step of a little wooden stile ; my father proceeded to unpack the basket, for we had brought our luncheon as well as his.

"I went down the brook-side to meet him. He was reeling up his line ; and I admired with all my heart the light spring with which he leapt from the stone in the middle of the stream on to the bank, and came towards me.

"‘Lizzy,’ he said, quite in a glow, ‘may I kiss my future wife?’

"‘Yes, John,’ I half whispered.

"And so he did, in the sight of my father and mother, if they had chosen to see.

"When we joined them, he was holding my hand, his eyes sparkling, his face still glowing.

"‘Are we to congratulate you?’ said my mother, defining the state of affairs in a moment.

"Then she stood on the step of the stile, to make herself tall enough to give him a motherly kiss.

"How happy we were !

"That is the picture of the wooden bridge and mountain stream that hangs in my boudoir. If I am tempted to be naughty, I always look at it, and recall the day when I meditated upon death, and found life and love.

"I should deserve to be dead if I did not strive to be worthy of the life and the love.

"In the course of that day it was proposed that I should

go with John to Tillwen Hall, my brother acting as my *chaperon*.

"My father and mother did not like to pay a visit there before the marriage, as it seemed to them like a prying into his family affairs, which with one so frank was unnecessary.

"Besides, they thought the fewer of my people with me, the sooner I should take to his.

"John was obliged to go to Tillwen, to speak with his uncle about settlements and all arrangements previous to his marriage.

"Tillwen, properly speaking, belonged to John, but he permitted his uncle to live in it, as a sort of quittance against the trouble he had looking after the property while John was a minor.

"But he had another house, which I was to look at, and see if I liked as well.

"No girl ever left home in a happier frame of mind than I did. I went determined to like my John's people, and I felt impossible that any misfortune could occur to me when he was by.

"You will easily understand that, of the ordinary lover-like ways, John knew very little. Having told me that I was the first woman he ever loved, and, as far as he could judge, should certainly be the last, he never said another word on the subject.

"But it was evident that I was now mixed up with every other thought and affection. He had taken me into his great heart, and there I was until death parted us. You cannot think what a serenity and calm this gave to my mind. I was not more sure of myself than I was of him. He did not alter any of his habits and ways to please me; he did not sit by me and whisper little fond nothings, he did not disguise an abrupt 'no,' if it had to be said more to me than anyone else, still I knew that his happiness was bound up in me. He showed this by a certain uncontrollable restlessness if I was not in the room—by never seeming to lose the perception that I belonged to him, by the constant putting my interest before his own, and regarding me as if I was the most precious thing belonging to him, to which all others must give place.

"He doubled all his uncle's apportionment of settlements, saying pathetically—

"'Poor Lizzy will have grief enough losing me—she must not be poor as well. She must be able to keep her carriage and see a few friends, and all that; she will want comforting, I know.'

"People may laugh at this odd way of thinking, but I think there is something very noble in the thought of the dying comforting themselves with making the living mourn only for the loss of their company, and nothing else. How sad it is to see the sacredness of grief giving way to the necessities of straitened means ; and to know that people, having just lost the being they loved best in the world, must put aside the time for mourning because of the urgent need there is to provide for the common wants of the morrow !

"But this has nothing to do with my story.

"We were met at the door of Tillwen Hall by a very pretty lady ; I could not call her a girl, because, though young, she had not the manners of a young person. She was very richly dressed, and had a sort of gossamer veil or cap on her head, which added to her age. She was fair, little, with beautiful auburn hair, and eyes that matched it exactly in colour. Her features were small and delicate, and her teeth beautiful.

"I am rather particular in describing to you my first impressions of her, that you may judge of the sequel.

"She welcomed me so cordially, that she put up her face to kiss me, which was an act of courtesy I was not much in the habit of giving and receiving. Owing to that, perhaps, our cheeks touched and nothing more.

"This was John's cousin, whom he had described to me as sister.

"I must confess that I was glad to see they were only on cousinly terms. This custom of kissing was not extended to him.

"Mr. Philip Joscelyn, her father, was a portly, pompous, rather noisy man. He had a laugh that went through one's head. Everybody has a something that jars with the rest of the world. His laugh was dreadful, and must have jarred everyone.

"His wife was an invalid, and never came down-stairs. She was a nice, quiet person, evidently afraid of her daughter, and ashamed of her husband.

"So, you may imagine, my anticipations on seeing John's relations were cruelly damped.

"Mine is not the first instance of such an occurrence, but I had one great satisfaction—John seemed to be handsomer, franker, more loveable among them than before—that is, his peculiar virtues shone with additional effect from the contrast.

"But my brother fell rather in love with Elise. He said he

had never seen anyone so delicately pretty in his life, or with such engaging manners.

"Men are so soon taken in, or rather they are soon fooled. I did not want Elise to be my sister-in-law, because I soon saw, if she loved no one else, she did not love my brother. She was merely flirting with him.

"I had not been at Tillwen above a few days, when John said to me,

"'Lizzy, dear, I am sorry you are so unhappy. Let me take you home again, only don't drive me away from you, as, if I can help it, I do not mean to lose a single day of your society until you are my wife.'

"'Who said I was unhappy, John?'

"'Eliza; not that she said so as a fact—she merely conjectured it, she said, from seeing you in tears.'

"'I have not shed a tear since I have been here, and do not feel at all likely to do so.'

"'How glad I am, Lizzy! and how nice it is to feel that whatever you say is the truth!'

"'Your cousin is very pretty, John. Why did you not fall in love with her?'

"'Good heavens! no. I would just as soon marry my grandmother. Besides, Eliza and I should never agree. It is not my business to find fault with her, but if you can get a straightforward answer out of her, I will eat a rhinoceros.'

"'Why should she desire to make you think I was unhappy here?'

"'Heaven knows, for I don't. I tell myself every day of my life to believe nothing she says, and I go on swallowing every word she utters, as if it was gospel. It's very ridiculous of me, isn't it, Lizzy?'

"'No, John; you do so because, being truthful yourself, you think everybody else is. But, if you are ever uneasy about me, come to me, and you shall have the truth and nothing else.'

"'I know it, Lizzie, and I think it a good plan—one that I won't forget.'

"After this conversation I began to perceive that Elise, or Eliza, as was her proper name, concealed under a quiet, affected air some great unhappiness; and I also saw that, before long, she meant to confide it to me.

"When that moment came, I was astonished to hear that not only did she love her cousin John to distraction, but that at one time she had actually been engaged to him. And to prove it, she produced a bundle of letters.

"I did not know his handwriting certainly, for in truth I had never seen him write (he dislikes it, as you all know to this day). But I was not the less determined that, whether he wrote them or not, I should certainly decline reading them.

"You must understand that Elise was gifted with an eloquence and a plausibility that almost persuaded one against the most thorough conviction. I remember feeling the greatest compassion for her, as she sat before me, wringing her hands, and absolutely groaning with anguish.

"She had very ugly hands ; they were broad, and the joints were strangely developed ; the fingers were flat, especially at the ends, as if they had been sat upon. Also, as the vehemence of her feelings made her forget herself, I was surprised to see how much of her beauty depended upon the elegance and extreme nicety of her toilette.

"I have seen girls roughly tossed about by a rude wind, looking all the handsomer and brighter for it.

"Now as for this poor little Elise, wringing her ugly hands with her little lace head-dress all awry, her hair dishevelled, she was quite an object. She did not present to me the appearance of a fair and lovely creature, so much as a fretful, bony, sickly woman.

"Nevertheless, her grief seemed real.

"Read !—read !' she exclaimed.

"I answered her only by placing the letters on the table.

"You refuse—you will not give him up ; you would rather I died of grief than that you should be disappointed. You, who have only loved him so short a time, while I—I who have loved him from my cradle !'

"I think she must have been four or five years older than John, but that we will not trouble ourselves about. I still made no reply, for in truth my regard for my own sex was much outraged by her conduct. I had such a love for our dignity and high-mindedness, that, with all my pity, I could not help being a good deal shocked.

"As she raved at me exclaiming :

"Will you not give him up ? Cannot you see that to lose him is to lose my life ? Is there no generosity in your heart ?' I answered at last :

"I am afraid I have no more than you have. If one is to be sacrificed, why should it not be the one whom he does not love ?'

"Not love ! Oh ! cruel girl, is it thus you mock me ? Read those letters—if ever a poor creature was loved to idolatry, I was she. Read—read !'

"'Never!' I answered, throwing back the letters as she thrust them upon me; 'I can ask John to choose between us, and shall be contented whatever his reply; but I will never be so base as to read what was not intended for me to see.'

"'You will ask John? You will expose me to him? I have confided in you as one girl might confide in another, and you will forget the bond of our sex, and proclaim to the world my weakness?'

"'I shall do no such thing. I love the honour of my own sex dearly, but I am not going to be frightened out of doing what is right by John.'

"'And am I not actuated by the same motive? Do I wish him to be miserable evermore, as he must be, knowing he is perjured?'

"'Hush!' I answered, now becoming angry, for she seemed less an object of pity than of contempt; 'we have spoken of you. Do not attempt to deceive me or yourself. For what purpose you have invented and acted so foolish a part, I know not, but I feel as sure that you never loved John, as I am equally certain he never loved you.'

"For a moment a sort of spasm crossed her face, but almost immediately after she laughed.

"She smoothed her hair, picked up and put on her little lace head-dress, shook out her dress, and stood before me the little fair, gentle, lady-like woman, who had been the first to welcome me to Tillwen Hall.

"'You are a good child,' she said, calmly. 'I shall tell John, in the morning, what a trial I gave your love for him, and how well you came out of it. Kiss me, my dear—I am now satisfied that you really love him!'

"So saying, she put her cheek against mine and left the room.

"Now you must not suppose she deluded me into believing this last most extraordinary statement. That she wished to prevent a marriage between John and myself, was as clear to my senses as it was possible. I supposed that she fancied she could so work upon my feelings—being a young, rather romantic girl—that she would induce me to believe she really loved my intended husband, and that I would promise to give him up. Extracting this promise from me, she would so arrange the affair that John and I should have no opportunity for explanation. I gathered this from what she said, as I have not told you half what occurred.

"But my love for my intended husband was by no means

of that flimsy character that I could lightly be bullied into sacrificing his happiness as well as my own. When he asked me if he might kiss his intended wife, and I consented, I felt as solemnly bound to him as if we were already married.

"Altogether, the more I thought upon the conduct of Elise, the more indignant I was with her. I could now very well understand why John never loved her. She was not a woman, but a sort of evil spirit—or she permitted herself to be governed by the most malignant of all human sins, envy.

"When I came down-stairs the next morning, she began a sort of bantering, foolish, false account of her scene with me the evening before, saying :

"'It was all, my dear John, to prove Elizabeth's love for you !'

"'Lizzy's love for me ?' answered my dear, frank-hearted John. 'Lizzy's love is like mine for her—it wants no proof !'

"And his good, kind eyes looked into mine with his whole heart in them.

"Shortly after this I perceived my brother was very uneasy. And, after a time, he told me that he must run home for a few days, to consult his father upon a matter of importance, and would return in less than a week.

"When he came back he brought my father and mother with him. Much as I rejoiced to see them, they both appeared to be oppressed by some misgiving. Harkening to my mother's advice, my father at last confided to me that they were all seriously uneasy about some reports that had reached them concerning Mr. Joscelyn's character. When my brother, acting from a sense of duty, went home and told them what he had heard, my father almost, and my mother entirely, disbelieved him.

"So vivid was their impression of the straightforward and honourable conduct of Mr. Joscelyn, they were for telling him at once of the falseness of the reports, and at the same time assuring him of their unbounded trust in him. But my brother was so earnest ; he said his authority was so undeniable, that in fact, love for himself, and, through him, for his beloved sister, was the sole motive that actuated his informer, that he must beg them to act with the utmost wariness. Let them return with him to Tillwen Hall, and they would have ample proofs given them of the truth of the reports, and all that would be asked by the informer was that for the sake of the family nothing should be openly said. Mr. and Mrs. Daintree should quietly take their daughter home, and say

they had changed their minds on the subject of her marriage.

"When all this was told me, I felt completely astounded by the wickedness of the plot. My dear mother, shocked at the change in my countenance, folded her arms around me, saying,—

"My darling, I believe nothing—I trust him as I trust you !"

"I turned and looked at my brother as she said this, and he flushed scarlet, looking also most miserable.

"I went and took his hand, saying—

"Elise told you—she is the informer."

"She is."

"She wishes to separate me from John—she wishes to marry him herself."

"God forbid, Lizzy ! she is engaged to me."

"But she has begged you not to mention the engagement."

"True ; her mother's health is so precarious ; when the warm weather comes ——"

"My dear boy, we are in the dog-days."

"Very true, my dear mother—I never thought of that ; I think I must have misunderstood Elise. But she certainly desires our engagement to be kept a secret."

"A thing in itself much against my liking ; you never had occasion to keep anything secret from us before."

"No, father ; and when I was so happy as to hear she loved me, my first impulse was to share my joy with you all."

"As is the custom of my dear children, I thank God."

"You must forgive me if I pain you, my dear brother, but Elise's mother told me she was engaged to Mr. —— ; she was in love with, and going to marry that young gentleman who went away soon after our arrival."

"Oh, no, Lizzy ; she told me herself he was only a boy, in whom she was interested."

"Mrs. Philip Joscelyn spoke positively of the fact."

"I must believe you, Lizzy, though I may doubt her—mothers are so apprehensive."

"Will you, at all events, be guided by my advice as regards the reports Elise mentioned to you ?"

"Certainly ; my father and mother have already extracted this promise from me, in justice to you."

"Then pray tell Elise that my father and mother, finding my happiness depends upon my marriage with John, decline investigating the reports, but will let bygones be bygones."

“But, Lizzy, that is impossible. They are so infamous.”

“Then they are, of course, false. Can you look at my dear John, and couple such a word with his name?”

“We cannot,” said my father and mother simultaneously.

“And I cannot,” murmured my brother, as if reluctantly.

“I ask you to say those words to Elise, more as an experiment than anything else. I feel sure you will be satisfied when you see the effect upon her.”

“I will do as you wish. Though I have asked Elise to be my wife, I love you too well, Lizzie, not to sacrifice my happiness to yours.”

“Thank you, brother ; I cannot help hoping that you will felicitate yourself upon the result, as much for your own sake as mine.”

“I know you do not wish to pain me, Lizzy ; but if your faith in John proves correct, I must suffer a very serious blow.”

“I think it will not prove so serious as you expect. Our father and mother have taught us to love virtue above all things, and there can be no real love unless she is the foundation of it.”

“Ah ! Lizzy, all the talking in the world cannot soothe over a disappointment in love. I have had an aching heart for you all this week, and something tells me I am but anticipating my own case.”

“Then I will suffer with you, and for you.”

“As shall we also,” said my father and mother.

“Thanks ! thanks ! I could desire no better sympathisers. It seems to me as if I must trust John to the full as much as you all do. But what am I to think of ——” He could say no more.

“Rejoiced as I was to see that my brother could not resist the conviction of John’s innocence arising out of the force of his own character, I was much concerned at his evident grief.

“I hoped that, on becoming better acquainted with the real nature of Elise, the knowledge would cure him of all love for her. But her duplicity and art, which made her so hateful in my eyes, assumed that plausible, wheedling, coaxing form that men are unable to contend against.

“So astonishing was her power, that instead of betraying herself, as I hoped she would on hearing that my father and mother declined investigating the matter, she turned the whole thing to her own advantage.

“My brother came to us more infatuated than ever, more

alarmed for me, more indignant about John, than he had been before.

"He solemnly assured my father that he had been shown letters that it was a positive disgrace for any gentleman to have written.

"How came they into the possession of Elise?" I asked.

"They were sent to her by persons who know and love her. She has not read them, of course, herself."

"But they do not know or love me. Why are they so interested in my welfare?"

"Lizzy argues well; what motives have these people to break off the marriage? Have they been injured by Mr. Joscelyn?"

"That I cannot tell. I only read two, they were addressed to a woman."

"They were not written by John."

"If they are such as you describe, I agree with Lizzy."

"My poor brother turned from one to the other, quite in despair."

"When I am with Elise, I feel the hottest indignation against John. When I am with you, I think him injured."

"Has Elise consented to your engagement with her being known?"

"I told her, of course, that you all knew it."

"Has she told her own father and mother?"

"No, she is most urgent that they should not be told at present."

"Waiting for warmer weather, eh? Well, tell her from me, when she comes to claim my fatherly salute, as an intended daughter-in-law, I will listen to what she has to say. Meantime, I think John the best son-in-law any father could desire."

"I need not tell you how I thanked my father."

"And now, listen how simply this terrible business was unravelled and blown away like smoke, and all unconsciously done by John himself."

"It was on the very next day, we being all seated at breakfast, when, earlier than usual, the post came in."

"Ha! ha!" said John, who sometimes, I must confess, laughed almost as loud as his uncle, "here is another mysterious letter for me. I always forget to show them to you, Lizzy, that we may laugh at them together. I conclude they are from some poor wretch whom you have rejected. They show you up most uncommonly."

"Anonymous, of course?" asked my father.

"Oh! yes, so I lit my cigar with the first, without reading it. Catching Lizzy's name in the second, I read it. I only wish the writer had been near, how I roared over it! The fellow had the impudence to say Lizzy was a flirt! I wished he had been within reach of my little finger at that moment. Only his consummate folly in thinking I should believe him, made me laugh. Now, Lizzy, my dear, come and read this with me, for you may be sure you are shown up in it."

"It was, as he said, a tirade against me, warning him, as he valued his future happiness, not to marry me. And it wound up with a solemn peroration as to what would be his fate if he did; finally, ending with the declaration that this was the last time the writer should trouble himself on the subject—the last caution that would be sent."

"'Poor fellow!' said John. 'he has taken a deal of trouble for nothing. I wish he had done the proper thing and put his name to the letter; we would have had him down here, uncle, and made him best man!—Ha! ha! good heavens! the folly of people!'"

"'Let me look at the letter?'" asked my father. "See," he continued to my brother, "the handwriting is much the same."

"'It is,' said my brother."

"'He has a letter in his pocket purporting to be written by you —'"

"'No, no!' shrieked Elise; 'give it me—give it me!'"

"But as for escaping out of John's hands, once prisoner in them, that was impossible. He not only held her, but read the letter within an inch of her grasp. Then, as he finished it, he gave it her, saying:

"'Take your letter, and take this, and go up to your mother. One has not the face to be angry with gnats that bite, but' (here he looked steadily at her) 'you know what I can tell, so take your warning, and that for the last time.'

"She fled like a ghostly mouse, and we did not see her again; in fact, we went home the next day."

"What a horrible—what a shameless creature!" said Mrs. Spooner.

"I pity her!" said Clara with her grand air.

"And I wonder what has become of her?" added Kate.

"She is married," replied her aunt.

"Married? Gracious heavens! how I pity the man! But how fortunate that you both trusted each other so much!"

"My belief is that half the misunderstandings that occur in the world arise from want of frankness, or trust in each other. But ~~As~~ regards this unfortunate Elise, all her efforts were of so clumsy a sort, I should have been ashamed of myself to be taken in by them. She was not skilful enough. That was a fatal mistake, only having one sort of feigned handwriting. In addition to which, she was not actuated by the finer motive of love, she was only moved by envy, consequently her subtlety and invention were more despicable than great. I am always low whenever I think of her. She was so unwomanly."

"Did your brother grieve much?"

"Oh! no; it was just as I said, he was so horrified, that his love turned to disgust at once."

"And what was it Mr. Joscelyn could tell against her?"

"I do not know; he has never told me."

"What! did you not ask him?"

"No. I would not ask to know that which he did not tell me of his own accord."

"Well, that was very good of you. She was a shocking creature, doubtless!"

"Pitiful!" said Clara.

"Hateful!" echoed Kate.

"If she had been here with us, what mischief she would have made!"

"We must have hoisted the flag to be rid of her."

"Thank goodness, no chance of hoisting that flag now!"

"The sea is going down so steadily, that I think we may look for the boat to-morrow."

"I hear from my friends, in last week's letters, that Ramp-ton is on the *qui vive* for our return. They hope and pray that we shall win, but they think we shall be almost dead with fatigue and privation."

"We must give a ball, to show ourselves off, I think; for I hope we shall look so blooming as to be complimented."

"If it had not been for that dreadful storm, I never should have felt better; but I am sadly pulled down by fright and exhaustion."

"We must nurse you up, Arabella, for the next few days. I cannot have any of my party look ill!"

"Before we go to bed, do, my dear aunt, tell me if I shall ever see Elise?"

"You have seen her often."

"I! how? Is such a creature admitted into society?"

"Yes. Why not? One must not expect all the world to

take up one's private dislikes and quarrels. I know people that think her the most charming woman in existence."

"Oh! Mrs. Joscelyn, you should warn them."

"It is useless, Arabella. Elise soon warns people herself. She and her husband (he is very like her) go from town to town—from county to county; they meet with kindness, hospitality, and love, which they requite in the only fashion they know—which I leave you to guess. And, if you guess rightly, you will easily imagine they never stay long anywhere."

"Do they ever visit you?"

"Oh! no; John would rather invite a pair of boa-constrictors to dine with him."





CHAPTER XV.

PUFF ! PUFF !



E left our dear Puffs rejoicing in the anticipation of having a good cook.

The squire rose, after an indifferent night passed on two chairs, in good spirits notwithstanding.

"I regard," said he to his fellow-sufferer, Spooner, who had bivouacked in a corner of the room, and seemed so comfortable, he had no inclination to rise—"I regard that fellow Scruttles as one entire falsehood from head to foot. I doubt even if his name is Scruttles. I hated the sight of him ; and why I was such a blockhead as to give him five shillings, is beyond my comprehension."

"I doubt," mumbled Spooner, from under a mass of great-coats, "if he was well brought up. From his very infancy I fancy his psychological structure was weak in resisting temptation."

"Doubt anything you like—the place has a different aspect to me now he has gone. I am off for my bath, Spooner ; and don't forget we want this room for breakfast. I will open the doors and windows at once."

Which was so effectually done by the squire, Mr. Spooner made a merit of necessity, and rose from his lair. Indeed, the saloon was now the Temple of Eolus.

He was gravely consulting his whiskers as to which shoot-in-coat he should put on, when he heard a shout.

The shout was the shout of the squire !

Was he taken with the cramp, and drowning ?

Mr. Spooner good-naturedly put off the question about his coat, and ran out just as he was to his assistance. He was joined by all the others, as a shout from the squire was no joke.

They were rejoiced to see he was not only on *terra firma*,

but nothing the matter with him, except a fit of excitement.

"The boat!—the boat!" he shouted again, though they were close at hand; "and, by Jove! there is a woman in it!"

"A woman!"

"A female!"

"A lady!"

"I don't know which—but 'tis something with a bonnet on."

"Arabella, perhaps, come for me."

"It is not Elizabeth—the bonnet is too large. There!—there!—now you can see it!"

"Suppose Muggs has sent us a woman-cook!" observed Frank, calmly.

"By heavens!" said Spooner, who the smaller the circumstance the more largely apostrophised it. "Muggs has sent us a woman-cook!"

"She shall not land here!" growled Crab, who this morning had a purple hue over his nob of a nose, and was altogether in a saturnine and gloomy mood.

"We must have a cook!" said the squire.

"But if she lands here we lose the challenge!"

The squire looked as if transfixed in stone. In about a minute he rallied sufficiently to walk towards the house.

Presently he returned.

"I must have my bedding out of the boat, whatever happens!"

"I will take care of that, for mine is coming too."

How the important affair was arranged with the lady in the large bonnet, the squire never inquired.

He heard shrill tones, that had a sound in them of an appeal for mercy, by which he inferred the digestion of the woman-cook had been much disturbed by her voyage, and she desired to land and die!

This modest request was of course refused by King Crab. If she meant dying, it was quite as easy to do the business on board the boat as on shore.

So, after a brief bobbing up and down on the inexorable waves, while the bedding and stores were landed, the bonnet and its owner departed the way they came, and, as King Crab grimly announced—

"The shores of Puff are unpolluted!"

In default of other help, the squire was girt with one of Sam's aprons, and sat down to shell peas.

He was very persevering, and in spite of the skipping propensities of the pea tribe on being released from their cells, he contrived to show a good dishful at the end of an hour and a half.

"I shall never eat peas again," said he, "without thinking of the poor kitchen-maid. What hard work it is!" wiping his brow.

Sam made a noise as if he intended to laugh, but strangled the inclination at the same moment, out of respect.

The squire demanded an explanation—

"The girls be fond of pea-shelling; they sits and chats, and shell a'most as fast as they tongues go. And if they gets a boy to 'elp, why, there is fun!"

The squire did not see how there could be any fun in it. He went to offer further help, and found Spooner with his eyes nearly burnt out of his head, and his face like raw beef, stirring some compound over the fire.

"Don't, Squire, don't come near me—I am at the crisis!"

"Why, your whiskers are on fire!"

"No!" exclaimed the unhappy Spooner, dropping pan and spoon, and clutching hold of those bewildered appendages, and drawing them within range of sight.

The squire, though mischievous, was alive to any *contre-temps* in the cooking line; so he caught pan and spoon just in time.

"Oh!—oh! you are stirring the wrong way, Squire; it will never thicken now."

But it did.

Finding he was more in the way than not, the squire betook himself to the look-out, and was gratified by perceiving the boat again on its way to them. He strode down to impart the news.

"Any bonnets?" asked King Crab, who was suffering from rheumatism in the left shoulder (he said), and was nursing it over the fire.

"No, not a bit of ribbon."

Again the squire departed, and again returned.

"It appears to me as if two cooks were coming."

"You see double," said the captain, with a feeble smile.

The squire left without an answer, and in five minutes rushed in, breathless and excited.

"It is that beast Scruttles!—he shall not land!"

"Why should he not?" answered Crabshawe, who suddenly revived on hearing his "excellent convict" was at

hand. His rheumatic attack was, after all, only the effect of moping for Scruttles.

"If he lands, I go back in the boat!"

"He has probably only come for his clothes and wages," interposed Sir George.

"Wages! I gave him five shillings, and that's just about five shillings more than he is worth. Well, I shall go off with my gun until he has had what he wants, and is gone again. I hate the sight of the fellow!"

It was truly the "excellent convict," more abject, more hideous, more beggarly than ever. He "'umbly begged parding," and tried very hard to be restored to favour.

"Wages were no objec'—leastways, it were a pleasure and a satisfagtion to serve such noble gents for nuffin. He were aware has he were much to blame a-making sich a beastus of hisself, but he were tuk o' the suddin, and if it were but a drop, it imposed on his 'ed immediate."

Of course, King Crab would have forgiven him at once, but the others represented that the wrath of the squire was not a thing to be lightly encountered.

Having promised himself to go home in the boat if Scruttles remained, he would doubtless keep the promise. The nerve opiniatum was in full possession at present of the squire's physique.

So, greatly to the discomfiture of the repentant Scruttles, he was hustled off back again to the boat. Not, however, without a bundle of clothes that was truly surprising.

Frank was not at hand to investigate its contents; in fact, he was looking everywhere for a couple of chickens that, but a short time before, he had placed on the kitchen table.

Finding that he really was to go, Scruttles had skipped off pretty nimbly to the boat with his bundle, and was half-way home again before the idea struck Frank that the missing fowls made part of the bundle of clothes.

There was no help for it.

But the troubles of our gentlemen were not at an end.

The new cook, instead of cooking the dinner, sat down in the midst of his kitchen and tore his hair.

It was at this juncture that the squire returned to the house.

"What a 'ole!" exclaimed the new cook. "Where's my hoven?—my 'ot closet?—my digester?—my braising pans?—my frying barsket?—'ow ham hi to cook with nothink 'andy?"

Fortunately the squire knew the man; he had employed

him at Deep-Cliffs more than once. Also, formerly, he had lived with Sir George, and was not without hopes of living with him again. So, finding it to be worth his while to make some exertion towards preparing a dinner even out of "nothink," he ceased tearing his hair, and proceeded to make the best of what he had.

Extremes meeting, by the time dinner was over, and he had been complimented upon his skill, he was now as eager to make the best of everything as the most confirmed Puffite among them.

"But," said he confidentially to his masters, who had summoned him to receive their thanks in a body for some first-rate coffee, "hi 'ope you will hallow me, gentlemen, to send fur a few necessaries. The sosses is by no means the sosses has hi patronise. I wants a 'am or two for gravies, some cooking hutensils, larding pins, ha paste cutter, and wariuous trifles as makes cooking a hart, gentlemen."

"Of course, my good fellow, you shall have whatever you require," vouched the squire.

"What do you mean by that, Sir?"

"Crab, my dear fellow, I mean no harm. I mean what I say—he shall have what he wants ; it is due to the man."

"I say he shall not."

King Crab had been very thirsty all day, and had tried so many ways of quenching that thirst, the rheumatism seemed to have been drawn from his shoulder into his brain.

The squire good-naturedly said no more, and, upon sleep taking happy possession of King Crab's wandering wits, word was sent to the new cook to make a list of his requirements, and they should be sent for on the morrow, when the boat was coming with the London post and newspapers.

The gentlemen had had their rubber—they were now indulging in their last pipe. King Crab was still sleeping the sleep of the thirsty, when the list of the new cook's wants was brought in.

It was composed, spelt, and written under the joint amount of learning possessed by the cook and Sam. It was a portentous document, and the very first item posed all the readers.

"Skores ! what are skores ? I never heard of anything like skores being cooked !"

They sent for an explanation, and were pleased to find "skores" was an original way of spelling "skewers."

Isinglass was another item totally incomprehensible, and twelve dozen eggs made into one word, with very few of the

proper letters, was as mystical to our four gentlemen as High Dutch might be.

"By Jove!" said Spooner, as they toiled down the list, "if we get all these things, it will be a matter of fifty pounds."

"Do you think so?" said the squire anxiously.

"I will put a sort of price to each thing, and cast it up when we have done. But, hullo! what is this, the end of all?"

They all eagerly looked, and all exclaimed, almost with one voice—

"A kitchen maid!—spelt 'cinching-made.'"

"That's impossible, you know," was the next exclamation.

"What a lucky thing Crab is asleep!"

"I am not asleep—I haven't been asleep at all!"

"That is lucky, as we are all just off to bed."

Frank having undertaken to curtail the cook's wants, and to express to him the utter impossibility of obtaining the last item, the "cinching made," the party separated and went to bed.

The next morning the squire was busy cleaning his gun, when the news came that the boat had arrived.

"Bring me my letters, please," said he; "I am too busy to come myself."

He was just putting the finishing stroke to the operation, highly satisfied with the manner in which he had done it, when there smote upon his ear a sound that made him believe himself bewitched, or, as he described it "be-deviled."

"Axing yer parding, Sir, yer honour, I 'umbly opes yer honour's well in 'elth, Sir."

"Scruttles—you ——"

"It be poor Scruttles, Sir, yer honour. I missed seeing yer noble honour yesterday, I be cum to hax yer parding, Sir, yer honour."

In spite of himself, there was something so forlornly abject and miserable about the "excellent convict," the squire had not the heart to say a rough word to him.

"Did you get your wages yesterday?"

"I didn't go fur to luik for wages, axing yer honour's parding. I 'umbly begs forgiveness. I were so lonely, please yer honour, I were a-feared."

"Make no more excuses; I forgive you. Now get along, and go home with you."

"I will, yer honour; and I 'umbly thanks yer honour. I

avent a 'ome, or a bite, or a sup, but leastways I thank yer honour for luiking hover my faults, yer ——"

"Here, go along, and take these five shillings. Don't let me see your face again at Puff, or I'll have you sent off to jail."

The squire felt himself under the necessity to use this threat, in order to cover the weakness which made him send another five shillings after the first five.

He had an inward conviction he was doing a foolish thing, consequently he shouldered his newly-cleaned gun, and marched off for a solitary war against the gulls. He felt he could not face his companions with his usual bold front, conscious of having done a silly thing. When he rejoined them, he found the boat was expected again the next morning, with the modified list of the cook's wants, and a boy to act as kitchen-maid.

The cook again so distinguished himself, that he was again summoned, as before, to receive the public thanks of the Puffites after dinner.

"When hi 'as my maid, vich hi 'ear his to be a boy, then, gentlemen, you shall see what you shall see."

"Can you make us a cream or two?—something in the confectionary line, I mean?" asked Spooner.

"Ho! yes, Sir."

"And *entrées*?—and *entremets*?"

"Ho! yes, Sir George."

"A beefsteak-pudding, I fancy?"

"Ho! yes, Squire."

"I daresay you cannot give me a basin of gruel now?"

"Ho! yes, Captng."

King Crab was, without any doubt, very unwell. Not only was his complexion of a colour bordering upon shades of green yellow, mixed with neutral tints, but he was incapable of saying a civil word to any one of his subjects.

He snarled at the squire, scoffed at Sir George, growled at Spooner, and was absolutely rude to Frank.

They were lenient towards him, and only went near him when obliged.

On Wednesday morning about ten o'clock, the gentlemen being all up-stairs making their beds, they heard their king discoursing in so cheerful a voice, they were one and all surprised.

Had he suddenly become so much better that he was enabled to speak cheerfully to Sam, or exchange an amiable sentiment with the cook?—two people whose names he would

not suffer over-night to be mentioned in his presence—the hearing them seeming to make his rheumatism worse.

“Who were you talking to just now, Crab?” asked the squire over the banisters.

“To the new kitchen-maid,” was the surprising answer.

“So the boat has come? Well, I am only going to empty the basin out of the window, and I will be down to see her.”

The unconscious squire strode down the stairs, across the saloon, through the corridor, and was met face to face at the kitchen door by Scruttles, begirt with an apron.

“I be cum, axing yer honour’s parding, has kitchen-maid!”

The squire said not a word, but turned on his heel, remarched through the corridor, across the saloon, up to his room, and began to open his drawers, and pull out his port-manteau.

“Gracious heavens! Squire, what is the matter?”

“Scruttles has come back as kitchen-maid—I am going home.”

“But how will you get home?”

“True; where is the boat?—perhaps it is not gone too far.”

He ran for his life, snatching up the first thing at hand as a signal flag. It was his own night-shirt, consequently of a good size.

The boat, though a mile on its way home, caught the sound of the squire’s shout coming across the water, and, beholding the energetic waving of the night-shirt, obeyed the signal and returned. Meantime horror and dismay fell upon the rest of the Puffites. They had passed the half, and the worst half, of the important month; they had become accustomed to their lives; they were feeling imbued with the hope of triumph. To have endured so much for nothing, with the prospect of having nothing but pleasure for the rest of the time, was too much to forego.

Even Sir George joined in the chorus, and exclaimed—

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t let us lose the challenge for a beast like Scruttles!”

King Crab felt, and it entered like iron into his soul, that he must obey the voice of the multitude. Not that the squire formed part of that multitude; he was in his own room packing his trunk.

King Crab did not know whether this lofty disdain of any argument, of the common right of speech, was as much to

his mind as if the squire had thundered into him a torrent of invective, which might give the captain an opportunity of bombarding him with some heavy artillery of upbraiding and satire.

Before he had made up his mind, Scruttles was once more handed into the boat, and Frank hastened with lively steps to assure the squire he was gone, and personally to assist in restoring his wardrobe to its proper place. The squire made no outward demonstration of his relief than by the usual sigh out of his capacious breast, which was of such volume, it blew from its perch on the looking-glass Mr. Spooner's Sunday necktie into the squire's big washing-basin.

But he looked out of the window, and caught a glimpse of the retreating Scruttles, who, standing upright in the boat, seemed to be apostrophising Puff with defiance and hatred.

"I declare the fellow is angry!" quoth the squire, quite pleased.

"Oh! yes—he showed his true colours I can tell you," answered Frank, "when he found he really was to go. His language was dreadful, and I have no doubt, had he an opportunity, he would no more mind putting us 'by,' than I should killing this wasp."

"What do you mean, Frank, by putting us by?"

"Did you not hear of his handsome offer to me, confidentially made, over some soup we were concocting together? 'Sir, Mr. Summers,' says he, 'I have that respect, Sir, Mr. Summers, for yes, that his so be has you wants hanyone put by, I wull do it handsome.' That is, if I had an enemy, Scruttles would kindly shoot him for me."

"The wretch!" but the squire had no time for more—there were sounds of wailing below.

They were from the cook. Nowhere could he find his larded sweetbreads, all prepared for cooking; not a sign to be discovered of a beautiful dish of cutlets to be served with sauce *à la Tartare*!

Frank thought he had been very clever in seeing that Scruttles had departed without a bundle—empty-handed; but he forgot that he might have pockets!

On Thursday morning the day broke grey and austere; a hollow murmur from the sea spoke of some inward commotion disturbing its lowest depths. The birds flew as if scared or seeking shelter. Nature seemed scarcely to breathe, lest she should awaken some convulsion.

Four of the gentlemen had gone to meet the boat, that

was bringing them some more necessaries—as well as the boy who was to act as kitchen-maid.

If there should chance to be any sign of the ubiquitous Scruttles, they were there all ready to prevent his landing.

Much to their secret surprise he was not. In his place sat a nice-looking, rosy-faced, good-humoured boy.

They were, however, so far justified in their fears, that Scruttles had made an attempt to come as one of the crew ; but the two boatmen had positively refused his offer of taking an oar.

“It is brewing up dirty weather,” said one of them, “so the housekeeper at Deep-Cliffs has sent her master a few extras. It may be as we can’t get over for a day or two. We told that fellow we darsn’t bring him for our lives.”

So the gentlemen saw the boat depart with feelings much akin to those they experienced on their first arrival at Puff. Once more they were about to be cut off from intercourse with the world.

But they had this advantage—they knew what they had to expect. They had experienced what it was to be left to themselves—dependent on each other for everything. To their own honour, be it recorded, they were not alarmed at the prospect. On the contrary they returned to their king and their palace, whistling and singing in the gayest of spirits.

“Let us be off and have an hour or two’s shooting, before the rain comes on,” suggested the squire.

King Crab, tired of his own company, decided to accompany them, though he shivered and shook as if in an ague.

The day grew darker and more grim—the wind began to blow in great gusts—the sea moaned with a sullen roar. Sharp scuds of rain came slanting downwards, making our gentlemen turn hastily homewards, and then ceasing, as if by magic, just as they had gone a few yards.

Frank ran up to the look-out, and anxiously gazed at Luff in the distance.

Sir George followed him.

“How like a great evil demon that black cloud lies just over Luff, Frank ! He seems lying flat in the sky ; his huge shoulder and folded arms encircling that round bit that will do for his head ; and two openings in it that are like two demon eyes glowering down.”

“Yes ; that cloud has taken a curious, horrid shape. I am

a little alarmed for them at Luff. The house is so frail, and these summer storms are often so violent."

"If it is a bad storm we shall have to go over in the boat, and see if they require assistance."

"So we must, George—that it is a very good idea."

"Here comes another storm! I think it is as well we cut home, Frank."

They met the other gentlemen at the door of their palace, King Crab looking bluer and uglier for his wetting.

And now occurred an incident that ought to be recorded, and which the gentlemen, when they read these lines, should blush as they read.

They turned into the kitchen merely to exchange a friendly word with the cook—to smell if they could what was preparing for dinner; and to learn how the new kitchen-maid performed her duties. They were all smoking vigorously.

The cook, the amiable cook, instead of receiving them as usual with a benevolent smile, flew at them, anger flashing from his eye, the basting-pin flourishing in his hand, like the most deadly of weapons.

"Hout!—hout!" he exclaimed, in a peremptory and disrespectful manner. "Don't ye cum 'ere a-smoking and segarring, and a-flavouring of my creams and confectionary with yer nasty tibaccar! Hout!—hout! I say!"

And out they went, quickly, meekly, hurriedly, like a parcel of naughty school-boys.

Were they driven in that rude manner from a certain dining-room for smoking?

Were they not asked by a sweet, a beseeching voice, accompanied by a smile that only a brute could behold unmoved, to refrain from smoking in that beautiful and fresh dining-room?

They remembered nothing about it. Indeed, so far from resenting this rude and peremptory prohibition to smoke, the squire said when out of hearing:

"Now that is a fellow I like; he is particular. I can fancy the flavour of tobacco, in such delicate things as creams and jellies, not good—in fact, nasty. I am glad he turned us out. I shall take care, now, never to go into the kitchen with my cigar lighted."

Oh! Squire Joscelyn, did no good spirit whisper in your ear, that an odour of tobacco, of smoked and stale tobacco, in a sweet and elegant room, was as unsuited to it as to creams and jellies? Did nothing prompt you to remember how unjust you were to Mrs. Joscelyn in that matter? No,

nothing of the sort seemed to twinge the squire's conscience. He dressed for dinner, whistling most of the time, and, when he was not whistling, singing. He did not even seem to think of the storm, which now began to rage.

The house at Puff was not only much better built than that at Luff, but was sheltered by the great cliff that formed part of its chambers and walls. In fact, the flashes of lightning and the pealing of the thunder alone made them conscious of its violence ; and but for the anxiety that began to grow in their minds as to how the ladies were likely to fare, they cared nothing for the storm.

They struggled up to the look-out on Friday, but though drenched to the skin, they were not rewarded for their pains by being permitted the slightest glimpse of Luff.

As mentioned before, it seemed as if the sea had gone up into the clouds, or, at all events, as if ocean and heaven were all massed together.

The time appeared to hang heavily with these amiable "Lords." The journal was scrawled about with every conceivable conceit. There was a picture of the squire sleeping on a chair. It could almost be said you saw the snore coming out of his open lips in a bodily shape. There was a group of four people at whist—time marked below as four o'clock in the afternoon. Then the same party was taken again in different places—time marked, "Two o'clock ; just had luncheon." Once more were these famous whist-players depicted, and underneath was written, "Eleven o'clock ; breakfast just over !" Thus it may be inferred the game of whist formed their chief solace and occupation.

There were many illustrations of the crab tribe in the journal ; almost all these having a remarkable likeness to a human face, which face was by no means handsome. Some wore crowns over their bead-like eyes ; some had their claws bound up, with a remark, "A crab with the rum-atics !" One larger, more hideous than the rest, was so unfortunate as to appear to be suffering from the toothache. Crab though he was, encased in a good stout shell, agony was visible in his expressive stomach—for that did part duty for a face—and every claw seemed convulsed with pain.

There were many receipts written down of those dishes that pleased them most during this lamentable time. As for adventures, they had none to tell. Even that learned professor, Spooner, had used up all the hard words he possessed, and had interlined, altered, and corrected his sonnet to the moon, so that there was no possibility of making head or tail

of it. He is even at a loss, himself, to know what he meant to say in the second and ninth lines.

It may be as well to give, at this time, that excellent receipt for a breakfast pâté, promised to the public and my dear reader, some little time back, and obtained from the housekeeper at Deep-Cliffs as a prodigious favour :—

Breakfast Pâté.

“A light-coloured calf’s liver cut into pieces about an inch square ; cut the same quantity of fat and lean bacon ; a small piece of butter ; small quantities of salt, pepper, spice, parsley, and shalot, chopped fine ; fry all these together gently over a slow fire, stirring the ingredients constantly.

“When thoroughly done, drain off the fat, and put the foregoing into a mortar, and pound it well ; season it highly. Bone and skin the game ; cut it into pieces ; lay it on the bottom of a stew-pan, with a little butter under it to make it firm ; do not let it get brown. When sufficiently done, season with cayenne, salt, a little clove, allspice, and black pepper. Put a layer of the force-meat or pounded mixture on the bottom of a pâté dish, then a layer of game, and so on, until the dish is full. The upper lay must be force-meat. Put the dish into a stew-pan of water on the fire, to steam for two or three hours, according to the size of the dish.

“When done, press it round with a spoon, and flatten it close ; have ready some clarified butter ; pour on sufficient to penetrate all through it.

“When cold, run lard over the top.

“Chicken, turkey, rabbit, make this pâté almost, if not quite, as good as game.

“It will keep some time.”

On Saturday, the third day of the storm, the rheumatism that had been flying about King Crab’s frame, settling like a swarm of wasps, first on one knee, then on the back of his neck, down to the other knee, up again to the left shoulder-blade, now seemed to have taken entire possession of his whole body.

That disregard for a superfluity of raiment in which he had prided himself on first coming to Puff, was, no doubt, praise-worthy. But it had its inconveniences. He was not able to change his garments as often as prudence required. This, probably, was the real secret of his rheumatic pains, added to which (though this is confided to the reader in strictest con-

fidence), he really was too old to rough it. Not so much, perhaps, in point of years, as that his blood did not flow in that genial and healthy manner that enables a man to take liberties with his constitution, and yet not injure it.

Captain Crabshaw's temperament was of that bilious, sluggish sort, it was wholly incapable of throwing off a chill by its own efforts. He had no more warmth in him that a moonbeam on a December night.

He thought to remove the chill out of his marrow by constant potations of hot brandy and water. This remedy upset the economy of his liver, so that he really was nearly as ill as he felt.

On this Saturday evening, moved by his complaints, Frank improvised a sofa for him in the saloon.

Though he was too ill to eat any dinner, Spooner assured him cheerfully that he would be amused seeing them enjoy theirs.

It is our painful duty to record, it afforded him no amusement whatever. On the contrary his pains and aches seemed to increase the more hilarious they became.

Of all the remedies that past generations have invented and immortalised as a cure for melancholy, megrims, dumps, and vapours, none appear so effectual as a good dinner. Our four friends ate and drank, enjoyed every dish, and toasted each other with an utter disregard of the weather, and a most unfeeling indifference to the state of King Crab's bones.

He refrained from demanding too much sympathy while they dined, from an inward conviction it would be useless to ask it. But when they arose from the table of feasting, only to return to the table of whist, it was too aggravating. Not the most ailing woman that ever existed, with her nerves all vibrating in a state of agonised sensitiveness, ever longed for and demanded sympathy with a keener relish, than this gallant upholder of male superiority.

Thus, not a single deal was played in peace. If his friends did not feel his bodily pains as acutely as himself, at all events they should share the dolour they gave him.

The squire good-naturedly got up once or twice and attempted the office of nurse, in adjusting his cushions, but his elephantine touches made the sensitive invalid bawl for mercy.

Sir George went up-stairs and brought him his pet novel, into the third volume of which he was himself deeply plunged,

Spooner and Frank took it by turns to recommend him all the remedies that ever were heard of.

Failing to ease his pains, mentally or bodily, and the squire becoming too confused with all these interruptions to go on playing, they all simultaneously recommended a good dose of bed to the unfortunate captain.

"Between the blankets, you know, Crab," suggested Spooner.

"I always sleep between blankets," was the surly answer

"A basin of hot gruel when you are in bed."

"Poison!"

"A dose of physic."

"Pah!"

"By-the-bye, has anyone got any physic?"

"Not I," quoth the squire. "Elizabeth doses me, if I want dosing."

"What does she give you?" asked the captain eagerly.

"I have no more idea, my dear Crab, than an unborn babe. I take what she gives me, and ask no questions."

"And does it do you good?"

"Of course, I am always as well as a trout the next day."

"Query, why trout?" asked Spooner, with his philological eye turned on the squire.

"Oh! lor, don't ask me—say salmon, it's all the same; I don't understand the difference."

The next day being Sunday, his subjects strongly recommended King Crab to try the effect of a whole day in bed. He acquiesced.

He was the more amenable to their advice, because he knew it would be a very dull day for them down-stairs. The squire would, probably, suggest some prayers, which, in the present state of the captain's nerves, he felt would add to his ailments; there would be alternate hours for literature, eating, and sleep. But as for whist, or any amusement of that sort, of course the day forbade it. So, as his subjects could not enjoy any great hilarity down-stairs, the captain was content that they should indulge their weariness without him. They might be as melancholy as they pleased, but they were not to have any amusement unless he was by to share it as best he could. At first they were all very attentive to him, taking it in turns to run up and tell him all the news.

The squire informed him what was likely to be for dinner, but his voice was so loud, and his ways so restless, that the invalid declared he made his head ache.

Spooner crept into the sick-room, with creaking shoes and whispering voice, detailing, in murmured tones, how beautifully the clouds were being swept from the vault of heaven by a resistless power, and how delighted they all were to perceive the soft message or token of the ladies' safety after the storm; for, with the help of a glass, they had the satisfaction of perceiving smoke issuing from every chimney in the Palace of Luff. After one or two of these friendly visits the invalid was moved by his pains and cramps to tell the amiable Spooner he hated the sight of his face, as he always left the door open after him.

Sir George alone declined to go near him, on the plea that he might be sickening of an infectious fever.

Therefore, on Frank, at last, devolved the whole business of nursing this prostrate monarch. He soothed him, consoled with him, brought him broth, tea, and jelly; never mentioned the good dinner preparing below, shut the door carefully after him, and bore all the little spits of temper with unflinching good humour.

They got through the day pretty well.

Monday, they were enabled to shoot and enjoy themselves out of doors.

The invalid still remained in bed; Frank returned about four o'clock, to see if he required anything, or thought of rising. While he was endeavouring to amuse King Crab with an account of their day's sport, Sam put his nose in at the door, and said,

"Please, Mr. Summers, you're wanted to take a hand until dinner-time, as the gentlemen have come back."

"Unfeeling, heartless lot!" murmured King Crab; "you are my only consolation, Frank, and they take you from me! I may be dying—I am dying!"

"No, no; not the slightest fear of that; you are a little low and moped, nothing more."

"Why don't they come here and play whist?—it might amuse me a little to see them—oh!—oh! my poor bones!—that is, if anything can amuse me."

"I will ask them, Crabshawe. I feel sure they will do everything to oblige you."

The amiable Frank was deceived.

The three gentlemen strongly objected to afford Captain Crabshawe even this mild, second-hand sort of amusement.

"I should not be able to attend to my game, if he keeps groaning all the time," said the squire.

"And he distinctly told me to my face he hated the sight

of me," remonstrated Spooner, while he reddened with anger at the recollection.

"We are mad to go near him, until we know what is the matter with him," said Sir George.

"He cannot be left alone," demanded Frank of them all.

"Let Sam go and sit with him for an hour," said the squire.

"Sam!" exclaimed Sir George; "suppose he catches the infection?"

"You are just as likely, if there is infection, to catch it from me. So, take Sam for your partner at whist—I will go back to Crabshawe!"

"Upon my word, Frank, you shame us all! I really am disgusted with myself! Come along, I will go and sit an hour with poor Crab myself; but I forget—he says my voice makes his brains hit against his skull, until he does not know what he is about!"

"I think we had better make up his sofa again, and get him down-stairs for a while. He is only moped and crabby."

"Very good; go and get him out of bed, and we will make a couch for him in a warm, snug corner, where he can see and hear all we do and say."

Frank took up an amiable and soothing message to King Crab from his subjects, which he received graciously, and suffered himself to answer in the affirmative.

He was dressed and conveyed down-stairs with much care by Frank, and experienced a melancholy joy at being warmly received by the other gentlemen.

He felt a great mitigation of his pains, as they vied with each other in helping to settle him in his corner; and was, upon the whole, rather pleasant than otherwise this evening. To be sure, had they been asked, they would, one and all, have confided to each other they should have enjoyed themselves much more had he been away. He would insist upon knowing who had the best hand; what made this one laugh, if it was ever so little of a laugh; why another ruminated gloomily. In fact, he determined to be one of the whist party, whether or no.

This was borne pretty well at first, but on Tuesday evening symptoms of rebellion again broke out. He was so captious, so exacting, so universally unpleasant, that even Frank said:—

"Don't you think, Crabshawe, it is time you were in bed?"

"I am sure," said the squire, "you are very foolish to sit up so late; and as for my cards, one would suppose they were influenced by the weather. I never held such rubbish."

"You think more of your cards than of me?"

"By no means, Crab; I shall be truly glad to know you are safe in bed."

"Safe in bed! say in my coffin, for that will be the end of it! What a set of heartless fellows you are! A man dying by inches before your very eyes, and you think only of your whist! Oh!—oh! what a twinge—oh! my poor body!—my bones! Whist all day, and not five minutes to bestow on a dying man!"

"My dear Crab, don't think so dismally as that! I would do anything I could for you, my dear fellow, but you seem quite alarmed whenever I come near you!"

"You are so rough, Squire."

"I have no doubt of it. I am very rough; I wish I was more tender, for your sake, Crab."

"You cannot bear the sight of my face you know, Crabshawe, or I am sure I would most willingly assist Frank to nurse you."

"You shouldn't heed a fellow when he is dying—in the agonies—he doesn't know what he says—oh!—oh!—oh! my poor, poor bones!"

"Do you go to bed, Crab; it is tempting Providence to sit up any longer!"

"I won't go to bed! I sha'n't go to bed! My only comfort is seeing you all. Oh! oh!"

"But it is no comfort to us. We cannot do you any good—and you—you ——"

"I understand—you may well hesitate—I am in your way—I prevent that everlasting whist. Now, I tell you what—I don't mind confessing the fact."

Here King Crab rose up, and confronted his audience, looking, between ghastliness, want of soap and shaving, together with the loose arrangement of his dress, like an old Indian warrior, badly painted.

"I don't think," he continued, with solemn emphasis, "a woman would do it!"

"I don't think she would, Crab," answered the squire, kindly. "If Elizabeth was here, she would nurse you well in a brace of shakes."

"Go for her," gasped King Crab, sinking back on to his sofa, as if these words were about to be his last.

They crowded round him.

"We will go," said one and all.

"But not to-night," remonstrated Frank. "The ladies will all be gone to bed. The sea is still too high to venture to bring Mrs. Joscelyn without risk."

"I will go to-morrow, my dear Crab," added the squire. "I will start at daybreak, and bring Elizabeth back in no time. If ever a woman knew how to cure any sort of illness, Elizabeth is that woman. My dear Crab, I honour you for the thought."

And he looked as if about to clap King Crab on the back, but that worthy gentleman seemed to fear the mark of approbation, and shrunk into his cushions with dread.

"So now, think once more whether it would not be as well to go to bed, Crabshawe?"

"I will go, Frank. I would willingly live until morning. I should like to see Mrs. Joscelyn's kind face again. She was always kind to me. Oh! pity me!—pity me! what a pang!"

"Ha! never mind your pangs, Elizabeth will soon cure them. Good-night, my dear fellow, good-night; depend upon it, I'll be off the first thing."

So King Crab, assisted by Frank, and escorted by Sam, slowly crawled off to bed. As soon as he was safely deposited therein, Frank returned, leaving Sam as nurse.

"At what hour shall you start?" asked Sir George, as they sat once more down to whist.

"At dawn," responded the squire, shortly.

"I mean to take an oar with you, Squire, as Crab seems so anxious."

"Very good, Spoon."

Mr. Spooner did not wince. He felt with the squire; it was not a time to care for trifles.

"I think I will do Crabshawe that little service too," observed Sir George. "Naturally I do not like to go near him, for fear of infection; but going for Mrs. Joscelyn is a matter in which I can very well oblige the poor fellow."

"That will be three oars. I suppose, Frank, you will make the fourth?"

"Only on condition that you start at a more reasonable hour. The ladies ought not to be disturbed out of their morning slumbers, because Crabshawe has, what I see he spells, the 'rumatism'!"

"Very true, Frank. Suppose we arrange to get there to breakfast?"

"And suppose the ladies are not prepared to receive four hungry fellows to breakfast?"

"Oh! pooh!—pooh! 'Even if they are not prepared, I will back Elizabeth to improvise a breakfast in no time. But if you are going to make objections, we will take Sam."

"Take Sam, then. It shall not be said that I lost the challenge only because Crabshawe thinks he is dying."

"Gracious heavens! the challenge!"

"I had entirely forgotten it."

"Still I recommend that we should lose it, rather than let Crabshawe die."

"You are right, George—your kind heart is a credit to you. I decide to lose the challenge rather than lose Crab—I mean, you know, lose him by death."

"And do you agree with the squire and George, Spooner?"

"Entirely, my dear Frank. A man with a human heart in his breast, blest with those feelings that alike do honour to his head ——"

"And his inclinations," interrupted Frank—"I give you all credit, gentlemen, for the most sublime feelings of friendship; but still I think a little laudable curiosity to see the ladies ——"

"Well, after such a storm, you know, Frank ——"

"Arabella is always ill from a thunderstorm."

"Is a good deal mixed with this tender care for Crabshawe," continued Frank. "You can take Sam as the fourth oar—not that I remain behind for fear of losing the challenge, for, mark me, the ladies will cry out against the supposition; they will be the first to say that everything must give way before the illness—that it was a case of necessity—that you deserve to win the challenge, and not lose it, for sacrificing everything on the altar of friendship, for breaking the rules of the challenge, because King Crab has the 'rhumatics.'"

"My dear Frank, you are quite eloquent."

"I have been reading Spooner's share of the journal, and have caught a little of his style, I fancy."

"Are you afraid to meet Miss Severn, that you will not come with us?"

"Far be it from me to insinuate, by any act or deed of mine, that Miss Severn has anything of a formidable nature about her. I merely thought it was not quite respectful to our king for us all to leave him."

"Oh! nonsense—for only a couple of hours!"

"We will see how he is in the morning."

"For my part, I think nothing of his illness at all. He shams a good deal."

"Why trouble Mrs. Joscelyn, then?"

"Why?—because the poor fellow fancies her remedies. We shall have no peace until she doctors him. Sam, what is the matter now?"

"The capting, Sir, he is very bad. He is a-wanting of some party to make his will, Sir."

"Pooh! pooh! tell him to go sleep."

"That's jest what I says to him. 'Sir,' says I, 'jest ye turn yer face to the wall, Sir,' says I, 'and ye'll be asleep in no time, Capting,' says I. But he damns of me, Sir George, says he: 'Yer damned fool,' says he, and that's what I can't put up with, Sir George, to be a damned fool!"

"Certainly not, Sam—you did quite right to leave him."

"Yes, Sir George, and I won't go no more anigh him, let him 'oller ever so."

"Sam ought to see if our boots are blackened and clothes brushed."

"By all means, Sam, and air one of those last new shirts of mine—those with cricket bats and balls on. We shall want everything ready by seven; we are going to Luff, and shall take you with us."

"Thank ye, Sir George."

And Sam rushed off with such unusual alacrity, and with such an involuntary smirk over his entire face, that Spooner, always alive to these little signs, remarked:—

"One would suppose Sam was going to see his sweetheart."

"Of course; he is deeply enamoured of your Susan, Squire. He has confided to me that there is not such another valuable creature for a poor man's wife than she is. The catalogue of her virtues appears to me to swell larger and larger every time he speaks of her."

"He shall not have my good wishes. I cannot spare Susan; she makes the best omelette soufflè I ever tasted."

"Don't be alarmed; I believe he proposes to her about once a month, and is as regularly once a month refused. What is that noise?"

"I believe it is Crabshawe hollowing."

"Don't go, Frank—it interrupts the game so; we cannot do him any good. You can hear his lungs are sound enough, whatever may be the matter with the rest of his body."

"For our own advantage, I had better quiet him—I will be back in a moment."

Frank's soothing efforts had the effect he promised. They were not interrupted any more, and if their consciences smote them at all, the pang went off as they heard audible tokens of the invalid's freedom from all ills, mental and personal.

He was snoring in the most comfortable and approved manner.

The four gentlemen, excited with the prospect of the next day's adventure, did not feel inclined to go to bed, after they ceased to play whist.

They sat ruminating over the fire, each full of apparently pleasant thoughts—which thoughts, of course, were fumigated with the pipes of independence.

"I wish you would go with us, Frank," said the squire, at last. "I fancy a certain young lady will look very glum when she sees you are not of the party."

"I prefer she should look glum at my absence rather than my presence."

"Now, there you mistake. I am, as Elizabeth says, a complete owl in love matters; but I am not such an owl as to think that young lady insensible to your merits."

"When we decided to come to Puff, I understood you were partly induced to do so for my unworthy sake—in short, to rescue me from being snared."

"That was Crabshawe's idea. Crabshawe has a monomania with regard to women."

"I should say he had been jilted."

"Or refused."

"Does anyone present know anything of Crab's antecedents? Who was his father? Who was his mother? Whether there is any female specimen of the Crab family living? She cannot be pretty—in short, anything about him?"

"The foreman of the mine I superintend gave me a short history of his ancestors, which I will repeat if you wish it; but as it is not very creditable to our king, I fancy you will prefer to hear nothing about it."

"On the contrary, Frank, I should like to hear it very much. You may rest assured it will make no difference in our behaviour to him."

"Surely not."

"I am anxious to know something about him," said Spooner, "because his character is one that presents so curious a mixture to my mind of antagonistic particles, that the study

of it would prove, to an inquiring disposition, of the most intense interest."

"Now that is a matter in which I cannot agree with you, Spooner. I feel certain there is nothing in Crabshawe's mind worth investigating. So, Frank, let us hear what you know of him."

"Do you ever remember to have heard of a curious old Nabob who settled himself in that large old pagoda-looking house that one sees so conspicuously from every road in the county?"

"Old Bergsdorf! Half a Jew—half an Indian—wholly a maniac—if I remember right."

"Yes; he came from India with so vast a fortune that it was supposed to be absolutely impossible to calculate his real wealth. He bought the estate of Upshot, the name of which he changed to Bergsdorf; and it was said that he spent upwards of one hundred thousand pounds building that palace of pagodas, now crumbling to pieces.

"He brought with him an only daughter, whose dark skin betrayed her mother, and who received but very little courtesy from the ladies of this county in consequence. Yet the wealth of her father caused him to be greatly courted. There were many ladies, young and old, pretty and ugly, titled and not, who were ready to accept old Bergsdorf as husband, and promise to be a mother to his dark daughter, if he only took the trouble to ask them, which, it is supposed, he did not, for he never married. At the same time, he was a prodigious admirer of pretty women, and was never able to resist any request they might make to him, be it ever so extravagant.

"One foolish, whimmy lady of title took it into her weak brain to desire a summer pic-nic in the very depth of winter. She was looking dismally out of the window, watching the snow-flakes filling the air and whitening the ground, when she uttered this wish.

"The old Nabob gravely assured her she should be obeyed in a week; and it is credited now as a real truth, that the lady and her friends mounted palfreys at the foot of the great staircase on that day week, and riding through bowers of evergreens, enlivened with rose trees, and climbing-plants, from which fluttered singing-birds of every hue and country, reached a beautiful secluded dell in the park, where a sumptuous repast was prepared, after the fashion of a royal pic-nic.

"The air was balmy and soft as summer, innumerable

flowers enamelled the lawn, and the lady sat on the roots of a magnificent old oak, that seemed to be in full leaf, and listened to the singing of the nightingales. And yet, it is reported, the snow was falling heavier and thicker than before, the whole time.

"Money will do everything ; but such extraordinary feats savoured so much of the marvellous, that the Nabob began to feel himself shunned, as one possessing necromantic powers.

"He was a man of such violent and uncontrollable passion, that he was feared by his servants and dependants as much as if possessed by a demon.

"The only person who seemed to care nothing for his fits of passion was his daughter, Hinda. Much as she was slighted by her own sex, there are many tales still extant of her wonderful goodness and rare sense. She was so plain that it amounted to positive ugliness, though her figure was lithe, slender, and graceful.

"Amongst the household she was adored, as the angel that interposed her own person between them and her father's fury. She has been known to endure the lashing of his whip, meant for another than her, until, recognising her, the old Nabob has dropped it in an agony of remorse ; for he loved her, as much as it was in his nature to love anything.

"There was something so fearless, so resolute, so super-human in the manner with which she cast herself down the victim for all, that he could not but be influenced by it ; for there was always a just cause for interference when she did so. Child as she was, her father knew, as well as those that sought her aid, that she was ready to brave death in the cause of justice, but refused to use her influence where punishment was due.

"As she grew up, it became the sole occupation of her father to marry her well. It was, I believe, pretty well known that she would be her father's sole heir ; and, in case of her marrying to his liking, would be so dowered that few princesses could match the fortune she would bring.

"Among the crowd that thronged to become the possessor of so much wealth, some were disdained by her father, others were hateful to herself ; and there can be no doubt of it, few among the number professed, or, indeed, could profess love to one so singularly deficient in personal advantages. All her goodness, her rare qualities of mind, her wonderful sagaciousness, could not do away with the repulsive feeling caused by her dark skin and negro features.

"By degrees but three candidates remained. One was favoured by her father, one she liked herself, and the third was an amiable, not overwise, but good-hearted younger son, who felt that Hinda's fortune gilded her with a beauty he did not see in anyone else.

"The old Nabob commanded Hinda to marry Sir Hugh Gregson.

"'Father,' said she, 'he will leave me at the church-door, in the face of all your assembled company.'

"'Child, he shall not touch money of mine until thou hast my grandchild in thine arms.'

"'Then, father, he will not wed.'

"She was right; he refused to do so under the circumstances, even though the Nabob curtailed the time to six months after the wedding, when he should have the spending of Hinda's money.

"Now came the turn of that lover who was, as it seemed, indeed a lover.

"'He loved Hinda,' he said, 'for her rare virtues.'

"And they were married.

"The ardent desire of the old Nabob to see a grandchild was gratified, but he did not live long afterwards.

"Hinda loved her little child dearly; it was a girl. She loved it all the more because, after her father's death, she perceived that her husband either had lost his affection for her, or that, a consummate hypocrite, he had but feigned it while her father lived. Whichever was the cause—and it is too likely it was the latter—the life this unfortunate young creature began to lead was as painful and humiliating as the most wretched wife ever endured.

"Mr. Bernsdorf—for he had taken his wife's name—seemed to have been only accomplished in deceit. For the various labours, and the knowledge necessary for the care of so large an estate, together with the clear head and sagacity required for the keeping the accounts of all their moneys, their expenditure, and the long train of troubles that are attached to riches, fell upon Hinda. But the less able he was to comprehend these things, the more he lavished and rioted away, heedless of all his wife's entreaties and warnings.

"Sensitive in the highest degree, not only to what was due to her as a wife and mother, but as a woman, and one who, however dark her blood, and forbidding her aspect, had a soul as gentle, as pure, as unselfish, as the fairest woman living, Hinda could ill bear the daily insults of her husband.

Her duty bade her bear, as a wife should, all that it was possible.

"One day, walking in that very wood where her father had suddenly created a summer day in the middle of winter, merely to please the whim of a silly woman, Hinda met her husband walking with a person whom she remembered to have seen as a servant in the house of her father. They were laughing and jesting in a manner that brought a blush to Hinda's dark cheek.

"They both passed her with bold unabashed airs. When Hinda returned home, she went straight to her looking-glass and contemplated her features.

"I cannot even compare myself with that bad woman. Her fair face and rosy cheeks obliterate from my husband's mind the fact that I am his wife—that I am pure, while she is fallen; that I am the mother of his child, and she can be nothing but a shame to him. Is beauty so powerful? Is it not possible for me so to act, that I may rival that beauty by deeds that will extract a greater admiration?"

"From that moment she ceased to seek her husband's society; she withdrew altogether from his riotous and disorderly companions; she compelled his and their respect by an unvarying nobility of conduct, that was the more remarkable because all her money was in her own power—he had the control over but a small portion of it.

"Once or twice, when he essayed some insult, as in former times, she sternly rebuked him, and he was cowed by the very force of her character.

"Though the same roof covered them, no two people ever led such different lives. On her side of the house everything was serene, orderly, and beneficent; on his, riot, confusion, and sin.

"Once, as she sat with her little daughter, now ten years old, in a small boudoir that opened into a garden, Hinda heard on the other side of a laurel hedge much whispering and laughter, and orders given as to a child. Immediately after, there came toddling up to the window a boy some three years old. Pinned to his little frock was a paper, on which was written: '*Mr. Bernsdorf's son and heir.*'

"Hinda quietly unpinned the paper, and destroyed it. Meantime her girl, pleased with the child, brought it into the room, and began to play with it.

"This child," said Frank, after a pause, "was the father of Captain Crabshawe."

"Poor fellow!" murmured the squire, "he is not answerable for his birth."

"What became of Hinda?"

"So far from resenting the insult intended for her, she was like a mother to that boy for two years. All that he could have known of good he must have learnt from her. What wild ideas entered the head of his own wicked mother, no one knows. Hinda's forbearance and extraordinary magnanimity of conduct towards her husband, might have led to the first germ of the horrible plan that entered her head.

"A woman guilty of every possible sin against one of her own sex, may naturally be thought, without injustice, a monster. We need not fear to loathe and abhor her. In fact, there was too much reason to suppose that, fancying Hinda weak enough to love this boy as well as her own child, she made her very virtues and forbearance the plea to herself for what she did. Hinda's child died after a short and suspicious illness. Alone, among enemies, this unhappy creature made no appeal, suffered no investigation. She said,—

"Will such things bring my child to life again?"

"It may seem strange that such an occurrence should have been suspected, and no inquiry made; but, eighty or a hundred years ago, justice was not so active as now—from whatever cause, no scrutiny followed the loss of her child.

"Hinda utterly upset all the expectations of her wicked rival. She not only would never see the boy again, but, dividing the wreck of her fortune with her husband, she returned to India, and never again left it. He continued to lead this dreadful and abandoned life, until his son, of age, married the daughter of the third of Hinda's lovers—that younger son who, probably, would have made the best husband for her of the three, even though he carried his love of money so far as to let his daughter marry the base-born son, rather than lose all hope of having some of old Bernsdorf's wealth. He was, however, disappointed, for there was little left of what Hinda had accorded her husband. Nevertheless, still trusting to her fine, generous heart, they sent out our friend Crab to India, hoping she would make his fortune there.

"I believe it is not known whether they ever met, or if she was alive, or if she befriended him. Certainly he made no fortune there, and, struggling in India for the best part of his time in the army, our amiable friend came home, as we all know, some few years ago, and, it is reported, has nothing of old Bernsdorf's wealth in his possession, but that curious

hookah, that he always informs us was his great-grandfather's. That is all I know."

Wednesday morning arrived. Notwithstanding the late hour at which they had retired to rest, and the somniferous habits to which they had accustomed themselves at Puff (through the exigency of having to dispose of the hours somehow), they were all stirring betimes.

They each had an anxious confidential soliloquy with themselves as to what they should wear.

Sir George had decided over night as to the becomingness of a shirt adorned with cricket-bats and balls. A favourite suit of grey tweed, uncontaminated by tobacco fumigation, was to be worn with it. The only subject for indecision was his tie. Should it be mauve or Waterloo blue?

Mauve carried the day—it was the most fashionable, though it might not be the most becoming.

Mr. Spooner consulted his whiskers many times and oft as to the propriety of dividing his hair once more in the middle, and bringing two rounds of hair, well-plastered, to the corners of his eyes.

Whatever might be the advice his whiskers whispered to him, he found his hair refractory. Having been parted now for three weeks on one side, and become accustomed to the arrangement, every hair steadily rebelled against being ordered on a sudden to be parted anywhere else. If Mr. Spooner and his whiskers persisted in the old parting, abandoned for three weeks, he and they must do so at the risk of a smooth coiffure.

Mr. Spooner, being a neat, rather particular man, preferred a plastic, pliable parting to a ruffled one, and so decided to allow his hair to have its own way, which was fortunate.

As for the squire, not weighing his Elizabeth's love by the make and value of his garments, he yet had certain difficulties attending his toilet.

We have said that he loved his clothes, that he regarded them as part of himself. In fact, he was known to talk to them, and hold conversations with them, as one dear friend might do with another. He is now, at this moment, excited though he is at the prospect of going to Luff, holding a colloquy with two pair of boots, which he has arranged, for the convenience of parleying, in a row before him.

Both pair of boots possessed unmistakable characteristics of belonging to the squire. They stood straight and firm. They had an air of decision about them that seemed to say :—

"March we will, no matter where!"

They were open-hearted, frank boots, disdaining all disguise of being anything else than the squire's boots. In fact, had any of his friends, by the fortune of fate, met them in Africa, they must have said at once:—"Those are the squire's boots." And yet they are very different, one pair from the other.

"Yes," said the squire, to the rather dandy pair, with elastic sides, and a dash of the elegant about them—"Yes, I ought to wear you, going in the boat; but after all this rain it might be wet underfoot, as you say, Patch!"

This word "Patch" alluded, in rather an unkind manner, to the other pair of boots having a patch on one of them.

"Nails are forbidden on board ship, Patch; it does not do to go and mark the deck all over with pits, like the small-pox. I think I must wear you, Jemmy!"

The name Jemmy, it is presumed, arose out of the "Slang Dictionary," which accords to the word Jemmy a fine, elegant, fashionable meaning.

"True," continued the squire, "there is no deck in a boat, and you are dear old friends of mine, Patch; and, as you say, unless you had been the best of your kind, you would not have been patched. Besides, the nails are very useful to avoid the danger of slipping. So return to your place, Jemmies, and come on, Patch, we will stick by each other to-day, whatever fortune may decide."

The squire had reason, as we shall find before the day was over, to rejoice over his decision, though Patch was called upon to do a duty he little expected.

At last they were all ready, and started for the boat, Frank accompanying them so far. It is to be remarked as a singular fact that not one of them thought of inquiring after the interesting invalid in whose behalf they were so bestirring themselves. Had they really forgotten him?—or were they afraid to inquire, lest they should discover he was so well there was no necessity to go for Mrs. Joscelyn?

So far from thinking of him at all, they had scarcely patience to try and persuade Frank once more to come with them. And he looked so eagerly, so longingly, after them, they could not help saying to each other:—

"We ought to have made him come!"

It was half-past seven o'clock as they bade him farewell. When they were within a short distance of Luff, Sir George proposed pausing a little, as it was not quite eight. The squire had two oars to himself, Spooner and Sam one each,

Sir George steered. The squire was chuckling at being able to pull with advantage against the other two.

Suddenly Sir George's face, looking eagerly towards the island, flushed scarlet, his eyes seemed darting out of his head. Aghast at this sudden emotion, they all turned to look in the same direction. There, struggling with the branches of a tree, was the ladies' flag, which, even as they looked, was hoisted up, free of all impediment, floating clear and high in the air, while across the water came the shrill, sharp sound of a woman's scream.





CHAPTER XVI.

“LUFF IT IS.”



THE ladies had so far been relieved from their apprehensions regarding famine, and, in particular, the failure of that eminently feminine food, bread and butter, by the arrival of the boat on Tuesday evening.

From having to pick up their crumbs as valuable morsels, they now rioted in every sort of luxury. Happy as larks, they rose early on Wednesday morning, and went down to the bathing-cove, to see if the sea was sufficiently calmed down to permit of their having a swim.

Nothing could be more exquisite than the morning. The air was laden with balmy odours ; the sea was smooth and calm, and gentle as a mother's heart. There was not a cloud in the whole breadth of heaven. Everything gave promise of one of those lovely summer days wherein, it may be said, to exist is a luxury without any other good.

Susan, still remorseful and penitent, had risen early, that she might have her batch of new bread out of the oven in time for breakfast ; and as the ladies came in from their bath, the house was redolent with the perfume of newly-baked bread, than which none can be more appropriate for breakfast-time.

They all ran hastily up-stairs to arrange their toilettes, and be ready in good time to do justice to Susan's efforts.

Mrs. Joscelyn began to make the tea at a quarter to eight. Bessie was holding the tea-caddy, when she suddenly uttered a low cry, and let it drop. Her mother looked up in astonishment, and perceived Bessie, pale as death, staring at the window.

Mrs. Joscelyn followed her gaze, and beheld a most hideous, repulsive-looking beggar-man peering in. Her pre-

sence of mind did not forsake her ; she said softly in French to Bessie—

“Go, child, send Susan here, and tell the others to lock themselves in their rooms.

Bessie fled like a lapwing, and Susan, brandishing a red-hot poker, was with her mistress in a moment.

They both went out of the window, shutting it after them, and were visibly alarmed to see altogether three men on the lawn.

“What do you want here?” said Mrs. Joscelyn, as calmly as she could. But she acknowledges that, had she done as she liked, she would have sat down and screamed for help.

“We be cum, axing yer parding, Mum, for a bit of wital, or charity, or anythink as you may be as hobbling as guv us,” answered the hideous monster who had peered into the window.

“I have nothing for you ; and even if I had, I would give you nothing, as you have no right here.”

“Ho ! ho ! is that yer hanswer. Axing yer parding, Mum, ’ave hanother hanswer we wull.”

“Ay, we wull !” said the others.

“We dusn’t want for to go for to be oncivil, but we be three on us here, and there be three more in the boat, and we all on us wonts our breckwists, we does.”

“And we wull have it !”

“We knows, Mum, as there be no gents ; but we ’ont be oncivil, if so be as ’ow you’ll just let us ’ave a luik through the ’ouse. We ’ave heerd as there be mortal foine things ’i the ’ouse—goold and silver, and watches, and sich like. Oh ! don’t fear, but we ’ull be mighty civil, axing yer parding, Mum !”

At the moment, with a low growl, Runa sprang upon one of the men, and Clara, erect and disdainful, stood by Mrs. Joscelyn and Susan.

The man caught the dog dexterously by the throat, and his companions rushed to help him, drawing out their knives.

“If you hurt my dog, I will shoot you,” said Clara, presenting a pistol.

Struck by her commanding and resolute gesture, the men hesitated.

“Call yer dowg, Miss, or I’ll cut his throat.”

“Runa, come here !”

Loth to do so, Runa obeyed, and stood snarling and bristling by her mistress’s side.

"I repeat it again," said Mrs. Joscelyn, "I am not to be intimidated into giving you anything. There may be six of you, or there may be but you three, of whom I have no fear. I would advise you to go off at once."

"Ho ! ho ! you shows fight, does yer ? And the young lady—pray, Miss, is yer pistol loaded ?"

"It is a revolver," answered Clara, and without shrinking, in as calm and brave a manner as if she was a noted duellist, she pointed the pistol, and sent a bullet with unflinching hand whizzing between the heads of the three miscreants.

They looked, for the instant, abjectly afraid.

At that moment shrill screams smote their ears :

"Ho !—ho ! them be t'other chaps with t'other ladies !"

"Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Joscelyn, it is only Mrs. Spooner screaming with fright. I feel sure there are but these three, and with Runa we can easily manage them."

"Not so heasy as you think, Mum," said one of the ruffians, seizing her by the arm, and wrenching the pistol from her.

Now, had Clara only to struggle with one of her own sex, or a clean gentleman, she would probably have had a tussle for the pistol ; but the near approach of the disgusting creature, the touch of his hand on her arm so revolted her, she left the pistol in his grasp, and ran behind Susan, who was making lunges at them all with her red-hot poker.

This was a weapon that posed them ; they could neither grasp it, nor secure Susan, whose agility would have done honour to an acrobat.

Clara did not dare to bid Runa fly at them, which the noble dog was whining and trembling with excitement to do. She felt sure they would not scruple to cut her throat before her eyes.

Thus, though Mrs. Joscelyn, Clara, and Susan acted with the greatest bravery in the world, they felt how useless was the display—how powerless they were ; even with a dog, a revolver, and a red-hot poker, which latter, of course, was losing its virtue every minute.

Clara felt if one of them offered to touch her again, she must take to screaming quite as loudly as Mrs. Spooner ; while Mrs. Joscelyn, still resolved not to give way in appearance, was yet ready to faint in her heart.

At this moment Kate and Bessie joined them, each armed with another hot poker, the latter passing hers to Susan, and running off with the cold one.

"Aunt," whispered Kate, "we have hoisted the flag."

"My child!" said the other with anguish, "it will be too late!"

"Not for the coastguard. If they are looking out, they may be here in a quarter-of-an-hour."

"Too late!—too late!"

"Cum, Marm, be reasonable. Go you to hany rum yer fancy, and lock yersels hup, and we wunnot be oncivil. We'll joost tak a bit of breekwist, and each on us tak a little keep-sake or so, of such butiful ladies; axing yer parding, Marm—this here watch, now, 'ood be the werry thing for me. I'd a-wear it for yer sake, I 'ood, indeed, Marm."

"You scoundrel!" thundered a voice behind him, and though the wretch turned livid with fear at the sound of a well-known voice, he had no time to speak. He was hoisted up in the air by a strength that was at all times powerful, but, in the present instance, backed by passion and indignation, was wholly irresistible.

"You beast! you vagabond! did I twice give you five shillings, only that you should dare to come and alarm my wife! Take that, and that, and that! Blessed be the fate that counselled the putting on my nailed boots!"

Up to this moment our glorious squire, in his shirt sleeves, perspiring at every pore, without a hat, and no necktie, was the sole army that appeared for the rescue, but he was quite sufficient. Even if his presence and his voice had not appalled the three miscreants enough, he took breath for a moment, and knocked both the others down, while he still tightly grasped our ancient friend, our "excellent convict!"

Runa, with a bound of delight, rushed upon the prostrate bodies, and kept guard.

"Don't be alarmed, Lizzy, my dear!" gasped the squire, surveying the enemy with a glow of triumph. "I shall not leave go of this villain, this scoundrel, this cur, until—I say, Scruttles, look at me. 'With that I went.' Do you remember that, you hound! With that you shall go; and if ever you get out of prison again, I'll hang myself!"

The "excellent convict" roared for mercy, as he felt what it was to have an enemy shod with nailed boots.

For upwards of six weeks after this passage at arms between him and Scruttles, the squire would be observed to smile to himself. When asked the reason, he would say—

"I think somebody still feels what superb weapons are nailed boots!"

The Patch boots were kept by the squire evermore as gems, in a glass case.

And now came, panting and puffing, the other gentlemen.

"Where—where is my Arabella?" exclaimed her affectionate husband.

"Up in her room. I will show you," said Kate.

And this loving spouse dashed off to assure his wife of love and safety, under his manly protection.

Meantime, the squire, assisted stoutly by Susan, and delicately by Sir George, was handcuffing his prisoners with the best manacles he could procure. Between doing it effectually, and kicking them at intervals, he had not finished before Mr. Spooner rushed back to Mrs. Joscelyn, exclaiming—

"Oh! come—come and calm my Arabella! she thinks I am a robber, and she will not let me into her room!"

"Stay here, while I go and reassure her; for as long as she hear's a man's voice, which voice, as she very well knows, ought not to be heard here, she will not open the door."

"Darling creature!" murmured the husband.

Mrs. Joscelyn had some difficulty in gaining admittance herself.

"It is I—Elizabeth Joscelyn!" she called through the keyhole.

"The voice is the voice of Mrs. Joscelyn; but I know it is a blind. You are bound and fettered, and with a robber on each side, their daggers uplifted to stab you if you do not obey them, they order you to deliver up one victim more."

This is what Mrs. Spooner answered through the door.

"But the robbers are secured; your husband is here. Open, Arabella; you do not think that even to save my life I would risk yours?"

"Ah! you are a mother—they are perhaps torturing your Bessie; and what is my life in your eyes reckoned against hers?"

"Then will you look out of the window."

"They will shoot me."

After some further trouble and persuasion at last she peeped out, and saw her beloved Augustus gesticulating with arms, and legs, and whole body, towards her window. Whereupon she shrieked wildly, and, it is supposed, thought of fainting; but some intuition murmuring to her that she had better unlock the door first, she did so, and then had the inexpressible happiness of swooning away in the arms of her Augustus!

When Mrs. Joscelyn returned down-stairs she was amazed

to find the sacred seclusion of Luff swarming with bearded men.

There were the three robbers, still prostrate ; there was her squire, wiping his still teeming brows, and still making a sort of irresistible use of his Patch boots. There was Sir George looking on ; but in addition, were the lieutenant of the coast-guard and half-a-dozen of his men.

He raised his hat to Mrs. Joscelyn, saying, with a smile—

“ I beg your pardon, Madam, for intruding upon ground so sacred, but before he left the country, I received an order from Colonel Erne to keep a look-out on the island of Luff, and if I saw any strange boat approaching it, to put off and examine her. Early this morning, as soon as it was light, I noticed a boat, badly manned, struggling across the bay, and apparently making for Luff. It appeared to me that inexperienced fellows must be in her, as the drift of the current swept them down. They landed at Ribble, and remained there, either resting or sleeping, in a little cove just opposite Luff. I was at my breakfast, when the look-out man reported the boat again afloat, and that it was making for Luff. I immediately manned my boat, and arrived, not in such good time as I could wish, but, at all events, I can relieve you of the prisoners.”

“ Only on one condition, that you take them straight to jail. ‘ With that I went,’ Scruttles,” using the Patch boots.

It is needless to say the squire spoke.

“ Of course, Mr. Joscelyn. I have a policeman with me, and the three pair of handcuffs I fancied would be necessary. The superintendent lives close to my house, and I can safely promise they shall be in jail to-night.”

“ I shall come and see you hanged, Scruttles.”

“ Asking yer honour’s parding, might I be so bould as to arsk for a bite of bread ? ”

The squire answered this petition in the usual manner, which called forth a howl of agony. But Kate and Bessie, it is believed, ran to Susan, and stole from her one of the newly-made loaves of bread, and took it to them.

The lieutenant of the coastguard refused Mrs. Joscelyn’s hospitality, saying he was impatient to return. He took his leave, and, carrying off the prisoners, in a short time Luff was restored to peace and quiet.

“ Lizzy,” said the squire, returning from seeing the coast-guard boat off, into which Scruttles was assisted by his last and most energetic kick, “ how do you do, my dear ? ” and he

bestowed upon her, unabashed by surrounding eyes, a satisfactory and loud-sounding salute.

Mrs. Joscelyn blushed like a young girl, and altogether looked so pretty, the squire seemed half-inclined to kiss her again.

"I am sure you must be hungry," said his wife, prudently turning his thoughts into another channel.

"Hungry! good heavens! I now begin to feel the sensation of having ten wolves in my interior!"

"Ah! papa," said Bessie, springing on to his knee, "that is just what Susan said. 'Now that we hav' conkeered them pirates, if master haven't had his breakwist, he will be a-devouring of us all!' So it is all ready, papa, dear."

"Bring it in, Bessie, my pet!"

"But where is your coat and hat, and all those sorts of things, papa?"

"In the boat, I believe, my darling!"

"I will run for them, while you wash your hands and face in our room."

"Very good. But I say, Lizzy, shall we incommode you by breakfasting here?"

"Not at all, John, we shall be delighted. We were just going to prayers," she continued half in a whisper.

"By all means, Lizzy—nothing would be more to my mind."

So prayers were read, and the squire's amen echoed through the room. Immediately afterwards the three girls followed Susan, and presently returned, each laden with dishes. Susan, while the above matters were being detailed, had no sooner heard her master's voice, than she knew her mistress required no further help, and thought she was best fulfilling her wishes by preparing a super-excellent and abundant breakfast.

Mr. and Mrs. Spooner simultaneously appeared with it—she half tears, half smiles, and he like a respectable Dorking cock, who has just thrashed a rival.

Never was such a breakfast. In addition to that best sauce, hunger, everything was so excellent, so fresh, so appetising! And it was such a pleasure to see the table not only graced by many elegancies, that they now felt added so much to the pleasure of eating, but it was so delightful to see the pretty female faces, to be waited on so deftly and gracefully, to bandy words with such delicious, darling creatures!

As for Sir George, it might be supposed he had assumed Frank's character for the nonce. He helped the girls to help

the squire ; he ran in and out of the kitchen, as if he was Susan's only son ; he was quite benign to Mrs. Spooner, quite affectionate to Mrs. Joscelyn, and as merry as a boy with Bessie. The squire had just cracked the shell of his fourth egg, when that little damsel inquired :

"Pray, papa, did you fly over here ? for Clara and Kate only hoisted the flag ten minutes before you came."

"Hoisted the flag !" repeated Mr. Spooner, a little, just a little, of triumph in his tone.

"Hoisted the flag !" echoed Sir George, and, smiling, he whispered, "you see, Miss Daintree, you could not do without us."

"Hoisted the flag !" exclaimed the squire ; and, compelled to speak the truth, he added ; "you need not have hoisted the flag, we were on our—by-the-bye, Spooner, George, we have forgotten all about poor Crab !"

Down went all their knives and forks—the smiling and the triumph changed to misgiving and confusion. Mrs. Joscelyn was not slow to perceive there was a loophole somewhere through which the ladies, if they could manage it, might slip.

Still trembling in her heart at their narrow escape from robbery and insolence, all the woman rose in her at the hope that, though the ladies had hoisted their flag, the gentlemen must have started to ask their assistance, at least an hour before it floated in the air. With a happy countenance, she gaily asked —

"Anything the matter with Captain Crabshawe ?"

Now here occurs one of those strange anomalies in the human heart, for which there is no accounting.

The squire, though he had utterly forgotten all about the unfortunate King Crab until this minute, was a little indignant at his wife's easy air, and careless question ; under the influence of which feeling he uttered the nearest approach to a falsehood that his lips ever achieved.

"Poor fellow ! he is dying," immediately qualifying the statement by adding—"at least, he thinks so."

"He is very, very ill, poor fellow—almost delirious ; he could not bear the sight of me, Arabella, when the fever was high."

"Gracious ! Augustus—and you looking so well ! That style of doing your hair is so becoming !"

"Darling !" whispered the male A. S.

"We are afraid his fever is infectious. Frank stayed behind to nurse him," said Sir George.

"All his cry is for you, Lizzy ; he says, ' Go for her !—go for Mrs. Joscelyn !—let me see her kind face before I die ! ',"

"Surely he must be quite delirious to go on in that fashion."

"On the contrary, Lizzy, I thought him extremely sensible in his wish ; and as it was too late last night to come for you, I promised him to fetch you back after breakfast."

"Fetch me back, my dear John?—is a woman allowed on Puff? Shall you not lose the challenge?"

"Well, Lizzy, if you insist upon it we must ; we agreed last night that anything was better than that poor Crab should die for want of your assistance."

"That was very kind of you, and I am certain I speak the sentiments of all the ladies when I say, that you have not lost the challenge by such an act."

"That is just what Frank said. He said, the ladies will be the first to say the challenge is yours still."

"We will all thank Mr. Summers when we see him for his kind judgment of us. Meantime, do you consider that we have lost our chance by hoisting the flag?"

"No, certainly not ; but don't remind me of that beast Scruttles, or I shall not be able to eat any more breakfast. It was a perfect providence my putting on these boots !"

"I agree with you, Squire ; the ladies, under the extraordinary circumstances of the case, were quite right to hoist the flag."

"Go—o—od heavens ! my dearest Arabella, I never should have forgiven you, had you not summoned me as you did."

"Darling !" she whispered.

"This being amicably settled, do let me hear about Captain Crabshawe. Ought we not to go to him immediately?"

"Well, I believe we ought. I have made a very good breakfast, thank God, and I am ready to set out if you are, Lizzy?"

"Oh ! Augustus, don't—don't leave me ; they may come back, those horrid wretches !"

"I won't, my dearest love ; I will remain,—that is, if I may. I do think, Squire, it would be only prudent if one of us remained behind to take care of the ladies. Mrs. Joscelyn must return here, you know, this evening, and then we can go home."

"I am quite of Spooner's opinion, Squire ; and if you have Sam, you and he will easily take Mrs. Joscelyn to Puff, and bring her back."

"I can pull Sam round in a circle."

"Hif you please, Sir George, Suesin has a deal of washin'-hup, with hall this hunexpected company—I was a-thinking I ought to 'elp her."

Sam was in the act of coming in with more toast when the squire made his remark,

"Lizzy, my dear, put on your things, and I will row you over by myself."

"May I not come?" whimpered Bessie.

"No, no; Crab's fever may be catching. I am coming back, my darling, with your mother."

"Suppose, John, you dine with us when you return?"

"I should like it very much, Lizzy; but can you——"

Here the squire stopped short. The remembrance of the difficulties as to giving a dinner at Puff, before they had a cook and a kitchen-maid, made him hesitate about troubling the Luffs, who had only Susan.

"Bring back our cook, and our dinner with you," said Sir George.

"Well, it all depends on poor Crab; we must not forget that, if he dies, we ought not to be thinking of our dinners."

"I hope he is not so bad as that," murmured the little Rosebud, whose voice, usually like the voice of a little joyful lark, was, to Sir George's astonishment, as low as the cooing of a dove.

"I hope not either, Katie; so good-bye to you all for the present. There is something so extraordinary about that beast Scruttles, that, though I manacled him with my own hands, and know that he is in the custody not only of the coastguard, but the police, who have promised to see him safe into prison, I should not be surprised to find him here again when I bring my wife back, therefore I am glad you remain. If he comes, kick him for me, whatever you do."

Mr. and Mrs. Joscelyn set off together to return to Puff, quite like Darby and Joan. We have no doubt they enjoyed themselves very much, for the squire, in spite of poor Crabshawe's danger, took the rowing very leisurely.

Frank met them at the landing-place, and in detailing all that had happened, the squire wholly forgot the invalid again.

Frank, too, was so shocked, he turned pale and trembled, so that he also remembered nothing about his patient. Mrs. Joscelyn, therefore, made her way alone to the palace of the Puffs, and, guided by strange groans and cries, reached the room where lay the forlorn and dying Crabshawe. She knocked at the door.

"Come in," said a feeble voice.

"Oh! dear Mrs. Joscelyn, have you come at last?—only to hear to hear my last words and receive my last sigh."

"Upon my word, I do not think I shall do either, Captain Crabshawe. Let me feel your pulse. It is certainly not the pulse of a dying man. You have caught a bad cold, and you are a little bilious. If you had taken a good dose of physic, and afterwards one or two long walks, you would have recovered both ills in a short time. Instead of which, I should say, you have been nursing yourself into a fever with doses of hot-brandy and water, and coddling over the fire, until every breath of air seemed to give you a pang."

"Oh! Mrs. Joscelyn, what an angel you are! You have just hit it!—how clever of you! I will do everything you command me."

"Then I shall order you to take a certain dose that I will prepare for you; and I should advise your having a warm bath, and putting on clean clothes, well-aired. You will find yourself much refreshed by so doing."

"Anything—anything, dear, kind Mrs. Joscelyn!"

When that lady left the invalid to go and give her orders, she was obliged to sit upon the stairs for a few moments and laugh.

Such a picture as Captain Crabshawe, ill in bed, was never seen before by mortal eyes.

In the first place, his usually plain physiognomy was rendered simply hideous by a beard of three days' growth, and a face that had certainly not been washed for the same time.

He had huddled over him, for warmth's sake, all his wearing clothes, as well as his bed-clothes. He wore a red night-cap, with a tassel, but over it he had tied a coloured cotton handkerchief, which gave him the appearance of being a very wicked, old grimy-bearded woman.

Alack! if he was ever to hear of that simile.

However, he presented a very different appearance in an hour's time. Cleanly-shaved, renovated and freshened by his bath, clothed in a thick, handsome, shooting-suit of the squire's—for his own clothes, Mrs. Joscelyn said, were damp and wholly useless from wear and tear—he really almost looked like a gentleman.

And when Mrs. Joscelyn brought him a basin of hot soup, and allowed him a couple of glasses of sherry, he seemed as renovated in spirits as body.

The good squire, pleased to see the effect of his wife's nursing, did not begrudge King Crab the suit of clothes.

"He may have them, Lizzy," he said when she asked him for them, "and he may keep them. They are nearly new, so I have not got well-acquainted with them as yet, and I don't mind parting with them."

The next thing that Mrs. Joscelyn did was to tidy the house.

Acting under her orders, the squire and Frank moved furniture, routed out corners, arranged books, and placed everything in so comfortable and pleasant a form, they were quite delighted with their hitherto desolate saloon.

"This place is dreadfully unwholesome," observed she, "you cannot have had it cleaned since you have been here, or the windows opened?"

"We had no one to clean it, Lizzy, and Crab could not bear the least bit of air."

"Take him into the sunshine now; his illness is nothing but that he has become a little mouldy."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the squire, "mouldy! that is a new disease; but no doubt 'tis true as regards Crab."

"You may add some ill-temper to the mouldiness. I should not wonder if he fretted inwardly at seeing he had made no proselytes, that you were all anxious for the month to be over."

"How do you make that out, Elizabeth?" a slight severity in the squire's tones.

"Because I am, John."

"Well, Lizzy, that is frankly said. Between you and me, we shall enjoy talking over this month much more than the reality of it now."

"True," said Frank, "the remembrance of it will tend to make some of us more contented. Have I polished this enough, Mrs. Joscelyn?"

"Yes; it looks wonderfully improved—don't you think so?"

"How odd it is that women should know how to place furniture so as not only to be more comfortable, but to look prettier!"

"I do not think it at all odd—the oddness would be the other way."

"I must say, Frank, you are loyal to the back-bone; and so am I, whenever I give myself time to think about it."

"I hope, gentlemen, you will suffer me to offer this taper to light your cigars. I am going to mend some of your things, John, and will sit and chat to Captain Crabshawe while I do it."

Mrs. Joscelyn ran up-stairs for her work, and the two gentlemen, after lighting their cigars, the first they had had that day, put on their hats to take a stroll while they did so.

"Frank, she is the best wife in Christendom. I presume upon her sweet temper very often."

"Then don't do so any more, Squire ; she feels it, though she may say nothing about it."

"I daresay she does—she was such a merry girl !"

"I would never rest until she was a merry girl again."

"Humph ! Frank. I don't see how that may be. We have, I suppose, our proper feelings for our proper age. I think to see Elizabeth acting like a girl would not be quite to my mind. I am no deep thinker, but I am great at facts."

Thus did this famous challenge lead to the squire becoming a philosopher, and reasoning on matters with a great deal more sense, though not so many hard words as Spooner.

When the gentlemen returned from their stroll it was two o'clock. Peeping into the saloon, they were struck with its comfortable and cheerful air.

There was a little lively fire, though it was June, and by it lay the invalid, in a pleasant doze. Not far from him sat his nurse, the pretty feminine head crowned with a glory of hair, bending over her work, and looking quite domestic. On the table was spread their luncheon, which was arranged with as much elegance as if they were at home.

The captain awoke on hearing their voices, and expressed himself as decidedly better ; so much so, that he did not disdain a slice of cold chicken, which was followed by some jelly ; after which he achieved the feat of walking up and down the saloon several times, apparently without fatigue.

Luncheon over, Mrs. Joscelyn said—

"I now think I ought to return to my kingdom. I will leave a few directions for Mr. Summers, which will, I hope, complete the cure now begun."

Extraordinary to relate, the captain put on a face like a petted child.

"Oh ! don't—don't leave me, Mrs. Joscelyn ! I shall be as bad as ever if you go !"

"But absolutely I must return. I may wait another hour, especially as my husband is going to dine with us at Luff ; but not longer."

And now another extraordinary circumstance takes place, which makes the squire open his eyes in amazement, and Frank exclaim—

"A miracle !—a miracle !"

Said Captain Crabshawe—

"Let me go and dine at Luff too !"

"We shall be very glad of your company ; and I feel sure, if you wrap up warmly, you will take no harm. Fresh air and plenty of water are God's own physics ; and therefore I prescribe them on every occasion ; but you must not be late in coming home."

Cushions were put in the boat, and a comfortable place arranged for him.

Mrs. Joscelyn ordered Frank to come too. If one might judge by the expression of his face, it was an order he delighted to obey.

"We ought to take the cook, and his kickshaws, and the boy, Frank, for we are so many."

"But how will the boat bring us all back ?"

"It can go twice, and even if not, there is the boat of that beast Scruttles, which I have taken possession of, as I feel certain he stole it."

Mrs. Joscelyn was right in fancying the little voyage and the fresh air would do the captain good. He enjoyed it vastly.

Never was there seen a prettier sight than the groups that awaited their arrival at Luff. And when they discovered the invalid was with them, the hearty greetings and warm congratulations poured upon him, made a sort of an odd lump come in his throat. For the first time in his life he discovered whereabouts that neglected, ill-used thing, his heart, had hidden itself in his frame. He felt it thrill and beat with pleasure.

He was almost tearfully grateful, as Kate ran to prepare a sofa for him ; Clara carried his wraps ; Mrs. Spooner declared—"She was so surprised and delighted to see him ;" while little Bessie allowed him to put a hand on her shoulder as he stepped feebly out of the boat.

"Oh ! Miss Daintree !" cried he, as he sunk upon the cushions prepared for him by her ; "how kind you are to such a—to such a ——"

"Hush ! Sir ; we allow no one to call names in our island."

Now, it must be told of the ladies, that, shortly after dinner, they hastened up-stairs to hold a consultation upon their toilettes, at Mrs. Spooner's express desire.

"But," as Clara said, "why hold a consultation, when we have nothing smarter than white muslin ?"

"Good gracious ! my dears, did you not provide yourselves with a dinner-dress in case of accidents ?"

"No, Mrs. Spooner."

"And I did not bring one either," said Mrs. Joscelyn.

"What a pity ! for if I wear mine, I shall be so much too smart."

And she pulled out to view a brocaded silk, elaborately trimmed with lace and ribbon.

"It is such an auspicious occasion, you know," she added, as she pulled out the bows, shook it out, and displayed all its beauties.

"Pray wear it then, and we will make ourselves as smart as we can."

"I have some flowers," said Kate, half hesitating, and then producing a basket full of the most lovely fresh flowers ever seen.

"Oh ! how beautiful ! But what a pity they are not artificial ; you could then wear them in your hair."

"We can wear them as they are !"

"Gossip, where did you get them ?" whispered Clara.

"Where did you get your revolver ?" answered her gossip, saucily.

"Goodness me ! what it is to go to the Crimea !"

"Why, my dear Clara, why ?" asked Mrs. Spooner, eagerly.

"Because one becomes such a judge of flowers."

Too intent upon her toilette, Mrs. Spooner did not see the drift of Clara's remark. But Kate and Clara had a scrimmage—amicable, of course.

When Mrs. Spooner made her appearance in her brocaded dress, nothing could exceed the admiration of her beloved Augustus. He was one of those men who have an amiable weakness for wishing to see his wife the finest of the fine ; and to be able to say to himself—"That is a ten-guinea dress, as all the world must see ; no wishey-washy muslin or mohair !"

Mrs. Joscelyn was already seated in her chair, dressed in muslin—white ; and opposite her sat the squire, who was hardly able to refrain from telling her how pretty he thought her.

To tone down the youthfulness of her muslin dress, she had taken down her coronet of hair, and wore a little lace cap, which was run with ribbons of the loveliest blue colour, and to match the colour she had a little dainty apron of blue silk, which gave a finish to her demi-toilette that was quite

ravishing. To say nothing of two exquisite roses, acting as ornaments, which gave out a delicious fragrance whenever she moved.

In a few minutes the whole room seemed beautified and adorned by the appearance of Miss Severn and Miss Daintree, also in white muslin, but ornamented with natural flowers, placed with so much art and skill, Mrs. Spooner was obliged to wish secretly she had left her brocaded silk at home.

There was quite a flutter of admiration in the room.

"Lizzy, you seem to have very pretty flowers here," remarks the innocent squire.

"Oh ! very pretty," answers that subtle lady.

The gentlemen had to make apologies for their appearance being so very inferior to the ladies, which was of course excused. Captain Crabshawe alone looked more gentlemanly than he had ever done before, which circumstance was either owing to that air the squire's clothes possessed, or from the effects of Mrs. Joscelyn's specifics of fresh air and water.

Under the combined influence of Susan, Sam, the cook, the cook's kitchen-maid, it is needless to say they dined royally.

After dinner the ladies were about to withdraw, but the gentlemen unanimously entreated them to remain.

"You will wish to smoke," replied Mrs. Joscelyn, smiling.

"No, no !—oh, ! no," exclaimed several voices.

"We have no cigars or tobacco left," said Frank, calmly.

The squire looked at Frank with the greatest amazement. That this amiable young man should deliberately take the trouble of telling, for nothing, such (a d—d l-e, as the squire said in his thoughts) an untruth (as we say), was the most inconceivable thing in the world. He was so puzzled—not to say abashed—that he could only stare at him without uttering a word.

"Some more wine, Squire?" said Frank, as gay as a linnet.

"More wine !" murmured the squire, looking at him severely.

"Yes, we ought to do justice to the dinner—it shows, you see, how proper it is that all things should be amalgamated. The Puff dinner, added to that prepared at Luff, have together left us nothing to desire."

Frank was not the only Puffite that astonished the squire. Though Captain Crabshawe did not sit at the dinner-table,

but reclined elegantly (that is, as elegantly as nature permitted) on his sofa, softly cushioned by Miss Daintree, he yet ate of everything that Mrs. Joscelyn allowed him, with exceeding "relish," to use his own phrase. He also imbibed two bumpers of champagne, provided by the squire, with so much good effect, as to prove no tonic could suit him better.

In fact, until the hour of nine approached, he was almost himself—no, not himself, but a sort of newly-polished-up Crabshawe—a lively, good-tempered, mildly-jovial Crabshawe. A Crabshawe that might be styled quite a new species—amiable, sweetly grateful, and absolutely given to small compliments. Though, by-the-bye, they were not small; when a man takes a sudden turn, such as King Crab had experienced bodily and mentally, he goes, as the proverb says, "the whole hog" at once.

As Miss Daintree confided to her gossip, under cover of night and the bed-clothes—

"I thought the old thing would propose before the whole company!"

But to explain wherefore he astonished the squire. Just about nine o'clock he appeared to experience a renewal of the pains in his bones. But his nurse and doctor was not to be deceived or cajoled.

"Wrap up Captain Crabshawe," quoth she, "and take him to the boat; he is now in want of a little more fresh air."

"Crab, you are a humbug," remarked the squire, as the captain pleaded, with a certain abject likeness to Scruttles, to remain where he was.

"I will be no trouble, kind Mrs. Joscelyn. I will lie here all night, and not be in anybody's way!"

"I assure you that is impossible."

"But all my pains have returned. I am worse than ever—surely you would not turn a dying man out at this time of night?"

Thus it appeared as if the miracle Mrs. Joscelyn had performed was a miracle no longer.

He moaned, he groaned, the corners of his mouth went down, the ends of his eyes went up! He contrived to look bilious, and all the blood he could collect he sent up into the nob of his nose.

The "Lords" and "Ladies" were alike puzzled and perplexed. All eyes were turned on Mrs. Joscelyn. She rose equal to the occasion.

"Gentlemen," she said, "order your servants to wrap up

Captain Crabshawe, and take him to the boat. As Queen of Luff, so long as I reign, I permit no one to remain here after sunset, but my own subjects."

"But, Mrs. Joscelyn, suppose Luff is again invaded by robbers?" said Sir George.

"Yes, Elizabeth; we may not be so handy another time."

"For heaven's sake, don't be persuaded to risk such another adventure! In fact, I cannot—I will not leave my Arabella!"

("Darling!")

"Let us give up the challenge," said Sir George.

"Especially as we have lost it," remarked Frank.

"How!—how!" exclaimed all the Puffs, in angry excitement.

"Because you are here."

"But we have agreed not to consider the doings of this day as anything. The ladies are not to forfeit their chance from raising their flag, because it was a most extraordinary and untoward thing that made them do it. And we are not to lose our chance, for it was only common humanity to come and ask my wife to save Crab's life."

"Why not go to Rampton for a doctor, instead of troubling Mrs. Joscelyn?"

"My dear Frank, what is the matter with you? What has soured you? Why make all this bother?"

"Because I wish distinctly to understand, if we have lived in this most odious and uncomfortable way for more than three weeks, for the sake of the challenge, why are we to give it up just for a whim of Crab's?"

"My dear fellow, I am dying!"

"It is not so much on Crab's account, Frank, as the ladies. We give it up on their account."

"I'll be sworn they do not wish to give it up."

"We don't!" said three female voices distinctly.

And Mrs. Joscelyn continued—

"My dear John, it was, as you say, an extraordinary and unforeseen circumstance our being visited by those robbers. But I do not in the least fear it will occur again. Your convict came here as much to revenge himself, as to rob us. But if that is not sufficient to ease your mind, remember the coastguard look out; they were here, ready to aid us, within a very few minutes of your own arrival."

"That is true; and, Lizzy, you really don't fear being again left alone? You would rather we fulfilled the time?"

"I would—and I hope my companions think the same."

A sob from Mrs. Spooner.

"You know, Arabella, how much we shall be laughed at by our Rampton friends if we all return home within a few days of the end of the trial, apparently for nothing."

"True," said Arabella, wiping her eyes. "There is Mrs. Ensnob, Augustus, and Lady Bunting, and that odious Major and Mrs. Jones."

"Yes, dearest Belle, I agree with you, they will always have the laugh against us. We must part, love!"

"Oh! Augustus!"

"Well, Lizzy, I think you have decided rightly. Though if you were at all nervous, or had any fears, a fig for the challenge, and all the Rampton people!"

"I have no fears, though I do not care for the Rampton people!"

"But I promised them a dance, or something of that sort, Lizzy, when we came home."

"When did you see them?"

The good squire was nonplussed.

"Oh!" said that incorrigible Frank, "he wrote to them."

This was too much for the squire.

"I did not do anything of the sort; I—I——"

Here he was hustled, and his voice drowned by a chorus of all sorts of noises, in the midst of which, by a sign from Mrs. Joscelyn, the captain was forcibly enclosed in a great-coat, a large red worsted comforter tied over his head, a plaid encased his limbs, and he was borne off by Sam and Frank, as if he had been a mummy, to the boat.

The ladies walked with the gentlemen to see them embark.

The captain made one more feeble remonstrance.

"Mrs. Joscelyn, let me be one of your subjects—your slave!"

"Pardon me," she answered, "you are incapacitated for the privilege, by your sex. Good-night, gentlemen, and many thanks for a very pleasant evening."

So the gentlemen said farewell.

In the gloaming of that summer night there were sundry leave-takings that would not have taken place, it is presumed, in the broad day-light.

In fact, Sir George stepped into the boat with a sort of resigned feeling.

"I have gone and done it now! I shall hate myself if I don't follow up that squeeze of the hand with a proper proposal."

It did not appear that Mr. Summers and Miss Severn had so much interest in each other, as to make their parting in any way remarkable.

But as for the two A. S.'s, they kissed and parted, and fell into each others' arms a dozen times before the actual "tearing away" took place.

The squire so far felt the influence of the hour and the occasion, that he tucked his Lizzy's arm under his all the way to the boat, and, finding a convenient shadow under a slanting tree, thought to steal a kiss without anybody perceiving —this same Lizzy being averse to public demonstrations. He was correct in thinking no one saw, but, at the same time, everybody heard, which amounts to the same thing in the end.

"Lizzy," said he, after perpetrating the deed, "I have left you three bottles of champagne!"

At last they were off, Frank in the Scruttles boat (at which the squire had gazed with a gloomy look of disgust, that it was of no use kicking it), and the three servants.

The invalid was rowed home by three of his subjects.

But this eventful day is not entirely over.

When Frank arrived at Puff, he found Sir George awaiting his landing.

"Frank, do come and have a quiet cigar and chat with me."

"Let us put King Crab to bed first, and then I will chat with you all night."

King Crab was very pretty behaved, and went to bed like a good child, taking solemnly, as it was prescribed by Mrs. Joscelyn, a glass of weak brandy and water.

But before he went, the squire happened to say,

"Frank, what induced you to tell—to say—to perpetrate that horrid fib to my wife about our having no cigars or tobacco?"

"You came to Puff in consequence of being forbidden to smoke at home. That the ladies should have an inkling that you refrained from smoking all the way to Luff, that you never thought of having even one whiff on their island, that, in fact, you were ready to give up smoking altogether if they wished it (which you are), was to my mind such an 'eating of humble pie,' such an admission of your miserable month, such a triumph to them, that really I felt I could do no less than sacrifice my principles to defend your dignities—your rights as men."

"It was very kind of you, I am sure, my dear Frank," said Spooner,

"I don't think it kind at all ; he made me very uncomfortable ; we certainly came here in a pet, but I do not think it was altogether about the smoking."

"It was not, Squire," answered King Crab ; "it was to save Frank from the arts of Miss Severn. And do know, Frank, I think she is a nice gurl? She is much improved."

"Go—o—od heavens? Crabshawe !"

"Don't 'good heavens me,' Spooner, it makes me nervous to have a person articulating in one's ear like a woman. I have changed my mind—why should I not change my mind? Miss Severn is a nice gurl."

"Then, Frank, you may now marry her, if you like," said Sir George.

"And we have had all the bother of coming here for nothing, as far as regards you, Frank?"

Mr. Summers made each of these gentlemen a low bow, as if he assented to their remarks.

"Not that she mentioned your name, or made a single inquiry as to where you were, Frank, this morning."

"Naturally, she was thinking of Scruttles."

"Don't mention that beast."

"No, for she was sufficiently collected to tell me a great deal about Colonel Erne."

"Do not heed George, Frank; propose to her the first opportunity."

"Ah!" murmured Frank, "too late! too late!"

"Don't sigh so, my good fellow, you have almost blown me off my chair. Never give up! Fight the fine hero!"

"But I feel very friendly towards him."

"The deuce you do! Surely you will not let him carry off Miss Severn from under your very nose?"

"He is welcome to do so if he can; she must weigh about nine stone."

"Frank," broke in the squire, "you are a hypocrite."

"I was always truthful, until I came to Puff. I believe you were so good as to come here partly for my advantage. I hope you are satisfied with the result."

"My dear Frank," said the squire, his kind heart quite touched, "if we have interfered with your happiness, if in any way this expedition has cost you a pang, let me bear the blame—let me explain it all. I will say how unwilling you were to accompany us—how diligent you have been always looking out for the flag—how——"

"We will all do that; yes, indeed, Frank, rely upon it, you shall have every assistance we can give. Miss Severn will

not be worth having, if she can resist the tales we can tell of you."

"Thanks, thanks, gentlemen ; I feel—I know 'tis useless. So, Crabshawe, let me assist you to bed. While I am absent, my kind friends, pray moralise a little upon the inconsistencies of the male sex. I do not think any woman of my acquaintance ever showed more than you have done, and each time actuated by the worthiest motives of humanity for my unworthy self."

"Poor Frank," said the squire, when he was gone, "what he says is true ; we dragged him here to save him from Miss Severn, and now we are encouraging him to offer to her. How queer we are, Spooner !"

"True, Squire, the regulative faculty of the human mind sometimes gets out of order. The conservative principle of memory becomes absorbed in the productiveness of suggestion, and thus we lose the corrective principle of reason or common sense."

The squire was in bed and snoring before Mr. Spooner had finished his metaphysical definition of the reason why human beings were "queer," as propounded by the squire.

When Frank and Sir George met to smoke that cigar, and have that chat, they were the only persons still out of bed at Puff.

"Frank, I have had such a happy, such a delicious day, and yet it was not wholly without alloy."

"How?"

"Do you not see a change in Kate—Miss Daintree, I mean?"

"I thought her looking prettier than ever."

"Yes, she did ; positively, she has the loveliest colour—oh ! Frank, if she had been more severely burnt or scarred by that accident, what a thousand pities it would have been !"

"A million ! As it is, she is not in the least injured !"

"Do you think it was this narrow escape from a frightful death that has altered her so much?"

"You mean she was nervous and subdued?"

"Yes, instead of laughing and chatting, and being, as you know, a little saucy sometimes,—all merriness of heart, Frank, she overflowed with exuberance of spirits,—not at all too much—it was all most feminine and lovely. Now, to-day she appeared so shy, so subdued, she blushed and paled at every word. And, Frank, do you know, though I tried as much as it was possible to get her alone, she would not see or understand my wishes,"

"I should think not ; the truest, dearest, sweetest natures shrink from the inevitable moment of a confession of love !"

"You think she loves me ?"

"I really cannot, dare not say. She gives me the impression of having lost her girlish freedom of heart. Something, I fancy, has opened to her a glimpse of that feeling which governs us all more or less, George ; and the deeper the perception, the more strongly will she feel."

"Do you think so? Ah ! Frank, if I thought, if I was sure—but at all events, one thing is indisputable—I have discovered the state of my own heart. At the moment when I heard of her narrow escape from a fearful death, I felt how insupportable this world would be to me without her."

"That is the true state to be in, George, when thinking seriously of matrimony. Let me congratulate you, not so much on the prospect of marriage, as that in a real, true fit of love, one loses the consciousness of self. We feel that we cannot ourselves make our own happiness, and we therefore trust another with it."

"I understand you ; at present, had I only been able first to say one word to her, just to secure her, just to feel I had only to speak to clench the matter, I should be full of happy, elevated, pure feelings—feelings which, though but slightly developed, seem to promise me extraordinary happiness."

"A little suspense, George, will serve to test those feelings."

"I am not accustomed to suspense ; the fact is, Frank, do you know how Kate—Miss Daintree, got her burns ?"

"Yes, through her desire to rescue some paper from the fire written by her friend."

"Miss Severn—you do not seem to like mentioning her name, Frank. But don't be down-hearted, my dear fellow. She has a good deal of spirit, and may perhaps be offended that you did not come with us ; but she is a sensible girl, and must know what a good fellow you are."

"And you think Miss Daintree loves Miss Severn more than you, because she risked her life to save her paper ?"

"No, Frank, not all ; but do you know what the paper was about ? The Arctic regions, Frank !"

"Why should that make you unhappy ?"

"Because—because he admired her so ; girls, you know, are easily smitten with a sudden admiration."

"But the admiral is married, my dear George !"

"Nonsense, Frank ; I am speaking of his friend !"

"Oh ! Colonel Erne ; what has he to do with the Arctic

regions? Was not I to be angry at his attention to Miss Severn?"

"I know nothing about that; I only know this, that when the paper, that paper, was brought out for us to see and read, she blushed and trembled the whole time we were talking of those people."

"Perhaps she was still nervous at her escape!"

"Not at all; when they were reading it aloud, and describing how they suffered, and starved, and ate nasty things, I almost thought there were tears in her eyes."

"She is naturally tender-hearted, and she blushes with every thought."

"But she need not blush about whales, and walrusses, and blubber!"

"Certainly not, considering she is not likely to be asked to dine on them."

"I have a mind to go over to Luff to-morrow, Frank. If that fellow comes back I shall be certain to quarrel with him, unless ——"

"Unless Miss Daintree was pledged to be the future Lady Follett."

"You are right, Frank. I do not care a farthing for the challenge. I think I shall go and confide my wishes to Mrs. Joscelyn."

"But you thereby endanger our chance of winning. No; be patient, George. Monday evening will soon be here."

"I suppose I must acquiesce, though it is a confounded bore. I am nervously anxious to get the matter settled."

"It is a very good feeling, and will, I hope, increase."

"If it does, it will be utterly impossible for me to wait."

"Well, since your sufferings are so severe, suppose we propose to the others to go to Exe church on Sunday? You may get an opportunity then, without endangering the loss of the challenge."

"A capital idea! If the others will not go, you and I can row over, by starting pretty early."

"I am not very keen about going myself; but if you cannot get one of the others to *chaperon* you I will do violence to my feelings and accompany you."

"Thanks, Frank; I will say you are the truest friend; and if your love matters don't go as smoothly as mine, I shall pity Miss Severn—not you. She will never have such a chance again."

"You do me honour," answered the polite but imperturbable Frank. "Good-night."

"Good-night, though I feel as if I was utterly incapable of sleeping."

"Determine to dream of Miss Daintree—and the thing is done."

From the above conversation it will be seen that our two young bachelors are much changed since we first had the pleasure of making their acquaintance. Sir George is absolutely smitten with something like the pangs of jealousy, while that chivalrous and devoted Frank has become indifferent, cynical, demoralised !

It would require the brains of a Spooner to investigate and lay bare the peculiar construction of the hearts of these two young gentlemen. He would no doubt inform us whether it was the smoking, the want of a cook, the companionship of Scruttles, the air of the island, or all combined, that turned Sir George into an ardent jealous lover, and Mr. Summers into a cold, austere, fibbing, hypocritical sort of mild bear.

It is probable that Mr. Spooner would put aside any mundane causes as the effect of this extraordinary change ; he would doubtless attribute all to the metaphysical laws of the mind and brain. To himself the matter would be no doubt clear enough ; but to us, or rather, let me say, to the writer, alas ! I am unable, through ignorance, even to hint at so sublime a subject. I can but state the fact, that they were changed.

But Sir George was not the only person on the island of Puff suffering from the pangs of jealousy.

Sam, after assisting Mr. Summers to put King Crab to bed, returned to the kitchen, but paused as he heard voices.

Sam's ideas of honour did not extend to that branch which enjoins the propriety of not listening to a private conference ; perhaps he had never heard the proverb bearing on the matter.

On the contrary, he was stimulated to put his ear to the keyhole by hearing his own name, having previously peeped in, and seen the cook seated upon an empty barrel of beer, "raposiding to hisself," as Sam said to himself.

"Ha ! ha ! Samuel, my fine plush fellow, hu thinks has she have a hi to yer briches, but hi vill cock my cook's cap agin you. Ho ! Seusin, Seusin, you fust-rate critter ! You has a hi for dishing hoff a dinner, has I never see hequaled ! Ho ! Seusin, what a cleaner !—what a washer-up !—what a 'and for pastry !—what a convidence with heggs, hand a hangel hat seasening ! If Seusin and me were jined in whon, we 'ood set hup a heating shop. My faiks ! what a hunion

hit 'ood be. We 'ood make a repertation, Seusin ; we'd go to Lunnon, Seusin—none hof yer Rampton rubbigsh, wi'hout a single hidea of hart ; we'd be sent fur to coort, Seusin, to send hup her Madjesty's privert dinners ! What a fortin we'd make ! I'd come Sworway, and 'ave the haristocrisy a-running hafter me and Seusin. We'd keep our carridge, Seusin, and 'ave a little willa hout of town ; hu should 'ave a sating gownd, Seusin, and hi 'ood take yer to the hopera !”

“ You take yourself hoff, you pertater peeler ; and, mark me, if hi catches yer so much as winking at that theyre young woman, as his likely enough to be Mrs. Sam, I'll pound yer with your own mortar !”

“ You be blowed !” answered cook, valiantly ; “ do yer think yer have a chance agin me ?”

“ Chance or none, come on, I'll fight yer !”

“ I doesn't fight wi' menials ! Hi ham ha hartist. Yu knows hu haint Sir George's walet—yu his the hundermust feller. Sir George's walet 'oodn't dæmean his-self a-coming 'ere ! Do yer think has Mistress Seusin wull luik hat the loikes of yer ?”

“ Hi 'ave knowed Seusan a precious sight longer than you. I were brought hup with her hat Squire Joscelyn's, and hif so be as Sir George did chose me to come with him, it were a honour, I tell ye. Sir George is a koind master. He haint likely fur to furget has hi cummed with 'im when his own walet refused ! Talk of yer beggarly heating shop, hi shall 'ave a farm hunder Sir George, and Seusin shall be a farmer's wife.”

“ Ho ! that's yer game, his it ?—a pretty deal you knows of farming ! Hall yer knollidge lies in the calf line, hi ham thinking !”

“ A pretty fool you'll look at the hopera !”

Thus did they recriminate, and for aught we know to the contrary, went on all night.

It is no more than due to the ladies that this day, on which the gentlemen had met the ladies, under peculiar circumstances, after so long a separation, should be followed by a night, during which the “ Lord,” paid the “ Ladies” the compliment of being unable to sleep for thinking of them.



CHAPTER XVII.

“LUFF IT IS.”

YOU are not to suppose, my dear reader, that this eventful day was closed without the ladies also indulging themselves with a *repertoire* of all that had passed. No sooner were the gentlemen gone, than the “talkee talkee,” as the Chinese call it, began.

Mrs. Spooner called upon all her companions to declare that they had never seen Augustus look so well.

“The dear, manly fellow!” she babbled; “what splendid whiskers he has!—and the new style of doing his hair is so becoming! Oh! Mrs. Joscelyn, when I think of all I have thought, when I remember all I have said, I am thoroughly disgusted with myself! He says he has not had a single happy moment since he left me.”

“I hope you told him the same.”

“Oh! yes. I told him how I had desired to hoist the flag the very first day—how I had been so moped, making myself quite ill with anxiety about him, for fear he should wet his feet, or forget his flannel waistcoats; and I showed him my stocking—the stocking I am knitting for him—and he was so surprised! ‘Did you, did you indeed, my darling Belle, knit all this yourself?’ I thought you would not mind, dear Mrs. Joscelyn, my not telling him of the purling and plaining, and the taking-in, and the heel?”

“Oh! no, especially as now you must learn to do these parts of a stocking yourself, that Augustus may not be disappointed afterwards.”

“I will. I feel capable of making any exertion for him. We were both sorry you would keep to the whole month; it seems such a weary time from now until Monday.”

“We must be very busy.”

"And besides, he was alarmed so by the fear of more pirates coming."

"Mrs. Joscelyn," interrupted Clara, "I shall never again boast that a woman can defend herself. I have been quite alarmed at the strength of the two feelings that prevented me from using our two weapons of defence. I could not bear to see my dog hurt, and I shuddered so at the touch of that horrid man, I let go my revolver rather than endure it."

"I can very well fancy both feelings; but, by-the-bye, who gave you your revolver?"

"I did!" said Miss Kate, unblushingly.

"And how came you possessed of such a weapon?"

"Gossip," said Clara, severely, though her face was suffused with blushes, "unsay that fib immediately! Friendship no doubt demands it, but honour forbids the sacrilege."

"We got it," replied the little fibber, temporising in the matter, "from the same person who gave us the flag."

"Oh!" answered Mrs. Joscelyn; and "oh!" was all said.

Here we might enter into a dissertation upon the vast number of meanings that can be expressed by that smallest of all monosyllables. The greatest fear, the most tender affection, the deepest irony, and the most confiding sympathy; the utmost indifference, and the greatest cordiality; can all be conveyed by merely the tone in which people say "Oh!"

We shall not divulge the manner in which Mrs. Joscelyn said her "oh;" it was simply most expressive.

"But it is all very well having a present of a revolver; how did you know the way it is fired off, Clara?" asked Mrs. Spooner.

"I was taught by Mr. Summers."

"Oh!" (another oh!) "I suppose some time ago, as I hardly saw you speak to him yesterday."

"We are on friendly terms; you were so occupied with Mr. Spooner——"

"And who can wonder? Dear—dear fellow! There is no one like him in the world! And so clever too! Nobody knows what hoards of learning he conceals in his brain."

"'Tis a pity he conceals it."

"Only because he so seldom finds a mind sufficiently clever to understand his—that is all. With me he will talk by the hour, and always on some new subject."

"I cannot help wondering how the gentlemen endured as a

servant so dreadful a wretch as the head of those robbers ; they must have been very good-natured."

"Augustus told me the man came to rob us out of revenge, because they would not permit him to land at Puff. He waited until the boat came with stores, and then followed it very early the next morning. But he and his companions rowed so badly, they got to Ribble first. There they landed and rested, and, not thinking of the coastguard, or that they should be interrupted by anyone, took their time to come across to us, the distance being short."

"We had a most narrow escape. Half-an-hour earlier for the robbers, and half-an-hour later for the rescue, would have made all the difference."

"Susan's poker was delightful ; it gave me more confidence than anything else, for by it I perceived that in reality these men were cowards at heart."

"All people in the wrong are cowards, I think—they have to fight against right as well as might ; only desperate villains care for neither. Thus, this creature they call Scruttles was no man at all. He was an abject miserable thief, and his chief weapon against us was our repugnance to his presence, while ours against him was Susan's poker. He could not bear the common sting of a burn."

"Fortunately we never said the world could do without men ; we only argued that, for a specified time, we could live very well without them."

So thus the ladies discoursed. No pangs of jealousy seemed to afflict them ; on the contrary, watched by the coastguard, conscious of the pleasure the gentlemen felt at being restored to their society, pleased with the different incidents of the day, which had redounded most to their credit and welfare, the ladies were in high good humour.

Even Susan, alone in her kitchen, discoursed Miss Daintree's kitten upon the events of the day, with a sweet temper and forbearance that would have surprised her acquaintance.

"Thon ain't a bad cook, puss, by no manes. And Sam isn't over-much airified considerin'. He is a'most ready to jump out of his skin, as the time is a-coming for us to be going. I mostly think, cat, as it's best to bear wi' men, that one munnot be overborne wi' such critters. It's a most uncommon curous thing, pussie, that jealousy—cook was a'most forgetting of his stuffin', all along o' that fellow Samivel. Men is allers jealous of one another ; they is like one dog a-choking wi' puddin', grabbing another dog's bone ; he doesn't want it, but totther chap shannet hev it."

"But they may snigger and fight. I respects master, and if he be ever so hot, he niver goes from his promise! 'Tis binding as a law on him, pussie, whether for guid or bad, and that's a comfort, when one is a-dishing for dinner. But fur the rest of yer men-folk, puss, I doesn't care the whisk of yer tail; though I'll not deny as cook has a genus for seasining has most folk takes no regard on. He's particklar, puss, to a pinch, and a-weighs his little consarns to a grain, and that's a thing has desarnes a good wurd, if one can say noffin more of 'im! It's past me, puss, the hodd ways of men—allers thinking of their loove matters, which mostly is a state for fullish folks, and them as haven't a varsel thing to do. Hum!—hum! we know a think or two, cat, but we knows manners tew; let me git home to my own kitching, and then we'll see whose master!"

A great deal more was confided to puss, which it was a pity she could not convey to the island of Puff, and so put an end to the deep tragedy of love and jealousy, going on for "Seusin's" sake.

Nobody sat up very late at Luff. Runa was released from her kennel, and the doors and windows more carefully examined before they retired to rest. Everybody resorted to the expedient of leaving her bed-room door open, under the fallacious idea that it seemed as if they all slept together in one room.

On Thursday morning they awoke, still full of excitement, which was not allayed by hearing voices calling them. Running out to see whom it could be, they found Sir George and Mr. Spooner at the landing-place, who came, as they said, as a matter of duty, to inquire after the health of the ladies. They were anxious to know if they had suffered at all from the frights and excitements of the day before.

The queen of the island was under the necessity of being very severe, arbitrarily ordering these two encroachers to depart to their own dominions, which they did at last without landing, but much grumbling.

About three o'clock again they heard shouts—this time it was the squire and King Crab.

Nothing would satisfy that amiable invalid but that he must have a row on the water; Mrs. Joscelyn had ordered him to have as much fresh air as possible, and by some unaccountable means they had found themselves so near Luff, they thought it only their duty to call and say how fast King Crab was recovering.

There was no difficulty in getting rid of them, the squire

being of the same opinion as his wife, that they had no business there.

On Friday no great event happened, but that Mrs. Spooner, hearing Bessie her lessons while Mrs. Joscelyn was assisting Susan to make a sponge-cake, was overheard by Clara and Kate imparting knowledge to Bessie of a peculiar kind.

The word "trigonometry" chancing in one of Bessie's lessons, that innocent young lady begged to be enlightened as to its meaning.

"Oh! Bessie, you must not ask—it is a shocking word!"

"But if it is shocking how came it in my lesson book?"

"I cannot tell indeed, Bessie, my dear."

"Is it shocking because it is long and hard? Or shocking, because it is naughty and bad?"

"It means a most horrible thing, Bessie; and I will tell it to you, that you may never ask anyone else. It means a man marrying three wives; and bigamy, another word almost as shocking, means a man marrying two wives."

"Oh! is that all!"

"All! Mind, Bessie, you never mention such a word to anyone."

Which advice Miss Bessie followed to the extent of asking Clara, as soon as she saw her, and gaining thereby a rather clearer account of the word "trigonometry" than Mrs. Spooner could give her.

On Saturday they steadily packed up all day.

On Sunday the boatmen came to say that once every month a clergyman did duty at Ribble, for the sake of the lighthouse people. The service was generally in the open air, if fine. Would the ladies like to go?

The ladies fancied it much, and went, and were not disappointed in having done so.

The day was beautifully bright and soft. There was something inexpressibly grand in hearing the solemn service of the Church, with no lower vault than that of Heaven itself; and the human voice, preaching the words of life, had no limit to its sound. It seemed to penetrate like a warning to the most distant ear, distinct above the murmur of the sea, unconfused by the echo of walls.

That evening there fell upon the ladies a sort of silence—a gentle melancholy. Mrs. Spooner alone was a little fussy. She was continually packing the things she wanted at the last moment. But she was not without some perception of this

evening being the last scene of a drama they should never act again.

In her restlessness she wandered into the kitchen, and found Susan in the same species of melancholy.

"Susan, you are crying."

"I be, Mum."

"And for what, Susan?"

"After to-night, Mum, there bean't no more peace for me, not nowheres."

"How do you mean, Susan?"

"Well, Mum, it's not missusses as I complains on, or young missusses, or master, or the parlour company; it's sarvints theysels as aggrawates me."

"Poor Susan! Do tell Mrs. Joscelyn, and she will discharge them all, and get better ones."

"There ain't no better to be had. Sarvints is a ruined race; they is a set of individdles as is the provokinest of critters. You can't please 'em—no, not if you was to roast and bile yerself to a hatony. They must live like theyre masters, and dress like theyre missusses, and 'ave the imperance of the hold fella as lives down below the cellars, with a tail he has; one Muster Nicholas, as it ain't manners for wommen folk to say his neame. But dinno mind me Mrs. Spooner, Mum; I'll 'ave my bit cry, and then I'll be a sight better."

"Only think!" exclaimed Mrs. Spooner, returning to the saloon, "Susan is crying because we are going to leave Luff! But you all look rather melancholy."

"I do not know that we are so melancholy, as that women are rather like limpets, they get attached to places of which they have made a home. We may, perhaps, be thinking of what change fate has next in store for us."

As Mrs. Joscelyn said this, a quick gush of tears blinded Kate's eyes, though an irrepressible smile and blush accompanied them; she hid all on her aunt's shoulder, under pretence of kissing her; while over Clara's face there stole a serene glow of happiness, that lighted her fair face with a beautiful hue and expression. As for Bessie, she was a little sulky.

It has never been denied in this truthful story that Bessie was the least in the world spoilt. Thus, when in the doll-dolls, the effect of this spoiling came out. All the day she had been holding arguments with her mother as to the propriety and expediency of not going home to-morrow.

"Will you write to pa, and ask to stay another month?"

"No."

"Would she ask pa to let them all come back?"

"No."

"Would not some of them return, and let one of those
some be Bessie?"

"No."

Finally Bessie went off to Susan, as the only congenial soul on the island, and they comforted each other.

Meantime the Queen of Luff thus addressed her subjects on the last evening of her reign. It was not after the usual fashion of a queen's speech, for it began—

"My dears :—I do not like our party to break up without tendering you my best thanks for your happy companionship. (Here there was a little chorus of exclamations, purporting that they were all indebted to her.) I have been vastly happy (another chorus), and I owe it in a great measure to you. (Chorus.) I should not be worthy of being believed in this instance, if I did not allow that sometimes we have been a little dull. (Chorus indulged in small groans.) Do not deceive yourselves—we have been dull, all of us, in our several ways. But you never embarrassed me by complaints, or troubled me with murmurs. You fought your *ennui* with the best weapons at hand—work and determination. From the first I conjectured this would be our chief trial; for our natures are not bad ones (chorus), we will hope, now that we have tested each other's merits and foibles, by living together for a whole month. Though I have said we were dull, we have had adventures of so startling a nature, that it is probable we should never have met them had we stayed at home.

"Witness the coming of the 'Cannibal,' and the delightful consequences that followed, in our becoming acquainted with two distinguished heroes; of other consequences, perhaps (here a member of the chorus so vehemently clasped the speaker in an embrace, that for a moment there was a pause in the queen's speech) 'tis best to say nothing at present.

"Then we had our little amusements—of stories, and history acting. We must not forget how God delivered us from a peril by fire, in which I am certain, had He permitted it to extend its ravages, it would have caused the destruction of more than one life, and destroyed the happiness of numbers!

"We must not forget the storm. We must not forget those dreadful robbers, out of whose clutches we discovered we had no means to free ourselves, brave though we were for women, and had only just realised the pangs of our weakness, when

we were delivered. It is fortunate that we did not separate ourselves from our natural protectors on the plea that we were independent of them. We merely said, as became women, that we could better endure the loss of their society than they could ours. Thus we shall not be twitted on our utter helplessness—all but Susan's red-hot poker on that occasion!

"Also let us remember the lessons of human woe, of suffering, of heroic virtue, of noble fortitude, taught us in the churchyard of Exe. (Chorus.)

"And now I will revert, just for a moment, to the real origin, to the primary cause that made me accept the gentlemen's challenge. You will remember it arose out of a desire I had to put an end to certain attentions that coupled the names of two 'Lords' with two 'Ladies.' I hope you understand me. I am not often disturbed in mind, but a habit is growing among young men of the present day, to signal out a young lady, to mark her to the world by his attentions, and then to withdraw, saying he meant nothing but friendship. I feared this fate for two of my subjects!

"In thinking over the probable effect of my scheme for our seclusion, I can only say that the freaks of fortune are endless. Time alone will show if I did right, but at present I can dream of nothing but wedding-cake—I appear always to be inhaling the perfume of orange flowers; I see rings and favours growing out of the flames of the fire, and I am even fearful lest my little Bessie should come to me and say she was going to be married. (Chorus of laughter, with an assortment of the most approved blushes.)

"And now, my dears, for a little advice. If my dreams, my omens, my convictions come true, don't presume upon the wealth of love offered for your acceptance. Remember Luff, and how we were only dull there because the zest for our usual employments was wanting—women do not like working for themselves only. Also do not forget how it was proved to us that we must have some one on whom to lean, to trust. Strong-minded women there are, who may scoff at us, but to me there is no sight more lovely than the graceful ivy clinging to the mighty oak. And one last word about the challenge. If we win it, do not let us forget that we were very fortunate in the company of each other. No queen had ever more obedient subjects. May I hope she merited that obedience? (Chorus.) So now, having reviewed our position, and considered everything that has occurred to us, let me once more thank you for your love and amiability."

Thus spoke the Queen of Luff to her subjects on their last evening of their stay there.

They kissed and thanked her a thousand times, and responded to all her kind words fourfold. As for Mrs. Spooner, in the excitement of the moment, and the consciousness of Mrs. Joscelyn's worth, she forgot herself altogether, except saying that was she ever inclined to be discontented, angry, foolish, she would remember how their queen beguiled her to be happy, industrious, contented, and sensible.

Of this latter virtue Mrs. Spooner would have benefited by receiving a large dose. But nature interferes in doling out this commodity to the human race. Nevertheless, experience is sometimes good enough to repair nature's partiality. It is fair to presume that the female A. S. was so fortunate as to make experience her friend. At least, from what she is now saying to the girls, we may infer so.

"You have no idea what a difference it makes, girls, to one's comfort having a husband. All his goings and comings, his ins and his outs, his pains and his pleasures, are as interesting to you as to him. Then it is so nice always to have some one to refer to—to confide in, to run to, to be interested in all you do and say. That is what made me so dull here—I missed all this so much—I was almost, as it were, single again. I do not express myself very well, but I thank the Almighty that since I came here I have learnt what a wife is, or ought to be, to her husband."

Now, during all this speechifying, and confiding, and repenting, never one word said Clara. She pulled Runa first by one ear, and then the other. Once or twice she took the same little liberty with Runa's tail. Mrs. Joscelyn looked at her often, but obtained neither look nor sign.

And now we must for ever bid farewell to the "Ladies"; when next we see them, they will be the ordinary mortals found in every part of Her Majesty's dominions, whose acquaintance we made just one month ago.

Thursday, as we know, the "Lords" passed a good deal of their time rowing about on the water. Friday, they began to pack up, and the squire performed his part so thoroughly, that he was obliged to unpack his Sunday suit, for our gentlemen had all made up their minds to go to Exe church.

They had a very natural curiosity regarding its tombs and grave-stones. Even Captain Crabshawe said he would not miss seeing that church and churchyard for anything. This worthy gentleman's health was so fully re-established, that he never looked better in his life.

To be sure, that is not saying much, for under no circumstances could he have ever looked so that people might regard him with complacency. On the contrary, it was the habit of even those friends who knew him, sometimes to confide to each other—

“Crab looks more ugly to-day than usual.”

However, now he is looking better than usual. There is a sparkle in his eye, an eagerness in his manner, that quite amaze his subjects.

Moreover, he has written three letters—one addressed to a tailor, another to a bootmaker, and a third to the person who is supposed to do the duty of mother to him; and he was most particular in sending these by the Thursday boat.

It was on Saturday evening that, finding himself alone with Frank, the following conversation took place :—

“Miss Severn is a nice gurl, Frank.”

“So I think you said before.”

“It is a pity you have quarrelled with her.”

“It would be a pity if I had.”

“Now, Frank, my dear boy, I have a regard for you. I told you before that I did not think Miss Severn would suit you; she has a spirit—she would be too much for you.”

“Really !”

“Yes, you ought to have a nice little quiet gurl. Now, Miss Severn should be wed to a man of pluck and resolution, and good age; a man who knows how to govern. Has she any money?”

“In her purse, now ——”

“Tut !—in the bank; any fortune, I mean.”

“I do not know.”

“And yet you thought of marrying her !”

“Crab ! you monster ! a faint hope crossed my mind, as to whether she would permit me to ask her to marry me.”

“It’s all the same thing in the end, but surely you were prudent enough to make inquiries as to whether she had enough of her own, to pay her own expenses.”

“No. When I am so fortunate as to have a wife, I hope to be able to provide her with all she fancies.”

“That may be all very well for you, who have a fortin’ of your own; but you see, unless she brings something to a poor man, she is a very expensive luxury.”

“Of what luxury are you talking ?” asked Sir George, just coming in.

"Crab is talking of the luxury of a wife."

"No ! how much do you rate her at, Crab ?"

"I am only advising Frank—he is so thoughtless ! I tell him he ought to take care his wife has one or two hundred a year, to pay her own expenses."

"One or two hundred a year !—I doubt if that is enough for my wife's dress," responded Sir George.

"Then she is a fool !" retorted the captain.

"Who ?"

"Your wife."

"Captain Crabshawe, you shall answer to me for this insult."

"Stop, stop, my dear George, do not be angry ; you have no wife yet," interposed Frank.

"He has insulted her—all the same as if I had."

"This is too ridiculous ! I have a mind to let you fight it out ; only pray recollect that Lady Follett would naturally dress very differently to Mrs. Crabshawe. The latter would do her marketing in a cotton dress, while the former would be rolling by in her carriage, clothed in satin and ermine. Mrs. Crabshawe would be cheapening alpacas, while Lady Follett was selecting her velvets."

"Very true, Frank ; I was a fool to notice the fellow's words."

"Fellow indeed ! Sir George Follett."

"I beg your pardon, Captain Crabshawe ; let us have no more words."

King Crab accepted the apology with a clumsy grace. It was fortunate there were but two days more for these two to spend together at Puff. As it was, they only kept the peace by speaking no more to each other, beyond the barest words.

Saturday was the dullest and most uncomfortable day they each had ever experienced. They all seemed possessed by the demon of unrest.

On Sunday they were all lively again, and started betimes for Exe church. But they were longer going across the bay than they expected, and heard the church bells ringing some time before they arrived ; and they altogether ceased just as they were within a hundred yards of the shore.

But they reached the strangers' pew in Exe church in the middle of the Psalms, thanks to the manner in which the Exe psalmists sang the morning hymn.

They were some minutes in church before the fact pre-

sented itself clearly to the minds of one or two who looked for them, that there were no ladies in church !

The squire, of course, was not one of these ; he was properly saying his prayers. Only on coming out of church did he remark—

“Where did my wife sit?”

“They are not in church, Squire ; they may be ill,” said Spooner.

“It may be as well that we should go and inquire,” continued King Crab. “As Mrs. Joscelyn cured me of my illness, it is no more than right I should attend to her, if she is ill.”

King Crab, as a nurse, did not present to their mental vision a single qualification for the post ; on the contrary, had they not been in the churchyard, the notion would have been received with bursts of laughter.

“I am not in the least anxious about her health,” said the squire ; “as she would naturally send to me at once, if she was ill.”

“But some of the others may be so.”

“Of course they would send also, Spooner. Now that I am here, I mean to look at the tombstones.”

The squire had not gone half the round of the churchyard, before Sir George came eagerly to him, and said—

“The ladies are gone to Ribble ! One Sunday in every month a clergyman goes there to do duty. I propose that we go there too.”

“Very good ; I am your man—but, George, what a melancholy place this is ! My heart is quite sore for all these poor people.”

“I never allow myself to be melancholy, Squire, if I can help it.”

“I believe it is very good for one to be made to feel. I am a sad, hasty fellow, and always speak before I think. I never reflect on all the sorrow and misery that is going on in the world, as long as everything is pretty right with myself.”

“Why should you, Squire ? Everybody has his own worries and troubles.”

“But I have none in comparison of these ; and I am no better than they were. See here, now—read this stone. A wife and seven children, the youngest a baby six weeks old—all drowned ! and the husband was saved, and puts up the tablet to their memory—why, George, where is that man ? He must have died of grief.”

"I do not think so ; I daresay he is alive and merry, and married again."

"I believe some people are very heartless. I am sure I am ; but I would not do that. Ha ! I am right. See, George, here is his name, on the cross at the foot of the grave. He did not survive them six months. I am glad of that. They are all now in heaven together, please God."

The squire's ideas of a future life were founded solely upon the instincts of his own kind heart. So absorbed was he in examining the records of the graves, that they had some difficulty in getting him away.

"It is a drive of eleven miles from Rampton round by the bay to Exe—I shall bring Elizabeth over now and then ; I think it will be good for me."

When the gentlemen arrived at Ribble, they found the ladies had gone home !

There was a little dispute as to whether they should pass by Luff and hail them, or whether they should go straight home to Puff.

"The ladies are all well, and we are within three miles of Puff ; whereas, if we go the way round to Luff, it will make it six."

Common sense carried the day ; they went home.

No feelings oppressed the gentlemen on this their last evening, as had oppressed the ladies. They experienced nothing but a strong fit of fidgets.

An excellent dinner and the last bottles of champagne opened their hearts a little.

"I don't regret coming to Puff," quoth the squire, "though I cannot help feeling glad this is our last evening here."

"I am sick of the place," exclaimed Sir George.

"I must say an absence from a happy domestic hearth only urges one to rush back to it more eagerly."

Now, there is no denying that, upon hearing these several sentiments expressed by his subjects, King Crab had a right to grumble, just a little. It was not altogether quite civil to the monarch of the Puff realms.

Perhaps a slight remonstrance, a courteous sort of deprecating apology, would have turned these different opinions into a genial flow of kindly remarks, regarding the trouble their king had taken to govern them well and pleasantly.

But that personage was possessed of neither tact nor wisdom. He said at once, and boldly—

"If I had had a different set of fellows to deal with,

matters would have turned out very differently. I should have been asked to remain another month."

"I think your observation unjust. I desire to be told why you think so."

The words of the squire were no great things, but the manner in which they were uttered was simply stupendous. No lion of the forest ever growled in deeper wrath.

King Crab was not dismayed.

"None of you has ever had any heart in the life. You are all too fine. One was always thinking of his dinner, another of his clothes—all wanting his own particular whims and fancies to be done, just as if you were a parcel of—of——"

"Of women," suggested Frank.

"I might say women, but, upon my soul, I don't think it is doing them justice to say so."

"Since when have you made this notable discovery?"

"That evening we spent at Luff; they were all so merry, and happy, and contented."

"I wish to know," broke in the squire, whose sense of justice was becoming every moment more outraged, "why you made that uncalled-for remark about us? What have we—what have I done to merit it?"

Never had Mrs. Joscelyn aroused the nerve opiniatum into such startling energy as King Crab had achieved by that ungracious speech of his.

"Tut! tut! don't let us quarrel the last evening."

"I have no intention that way, but I will have an answer."

And the squire regarded the captain with the stern and unwavering gaze that is supposed to belong to the British lion, and which has the quality of awing the enemy at once.

"I meant nothing, Squire—nothing, more than that you are not exactly the right sort of people to rough it—to lead this life, you know."

"Have I complained more than yourself?"

"Well, no, Squire—certainly not."

"I have blacked my own shoes, cleaned my own gun, made my own bed, and helped to cook the dinner."

"Very true, Squire—all very true; no one could do more, I am sure."

"And Spooner?"

"Spooner has been very good too—Spooner has roughed it better than I expected!"

"And George?"

"Do not fight for me, Squire, pray; or Sam. I rather glory in hating the whole thing. If Crabshawe has a mind

to say I and my servant spoil the whole party, he is very welcome."

"I do not say anything of the sort. I merely contrasted my lot of people with Mrs. Joscelyn's—that is all. I never saw a more happy and contented set than hers. And, Frank! now, I acknowledge at once, Squire, that Frank is a fellow ——"

"Pardon me, for interrupting you," said Frank, "I feel like the squire, very sore on the matter of your accusation. Nothing that you can say to me now in praise will do away with the impression in my mind—which is, that you would have been happier had the 'Ladies' been your subjects, rather than the 'Lords.'"

"My dear fellow, probably there I should not have had my illness."

"Had the ladies been your companions, and not the gentlemen, you would have been contented."

"I don't deny, Frank ——"

"Make him say it, Squire."

"Say at once," said that lion, "you would rather have governed them than us."

"I have no doubt I should have got on very well with them. They seemed, you know, so—so ——"

"I do not care what they seemed to you, but if you meant nothing by your insulting speech to us, except to compliment my wife and party, I will forgive you. But as for forgetting, that is quite another thing. I am for doing my duty as well as I can, but if the Almighty has given me a memory, it is not my fault if it recollects who made a fool of me."

"Good Lord! how hot you are, Squire! I have no intention of making fools of any of you. I am still a little nervous from my illness, and my mind has been greatly upset by the end of all my endeavours to reclaim that unfortunate Scruttles."

"Unfortunate ——"

Here follows language, on the part of the squire, that may not be written down; but he wound up with an excellent peroration, which shall be recorded to his credit.

"God forgive me putting myself into this passion, and to-day of all days, when I have been taking myself to task for my many sins; ashamed that I should be so unworthy of all the gifts God has bestowed on me, with such freedom from the sorrows of which I read so many records to-day. But that fellow haunts me like a nightmare. By-the-bye, when his trial comes on, we shall know his right name. That's something."

And, consoled with this idea, the squire cooled down.

Thus the last evening of the "Lords" did not resemble the last evening of the "Ladies."

There was no speech from the throne, received with cheers, and endorsed with cordial acclamation. History has recorded many instances of the disorganisation, ruin, and devastation of a kingdom badly governed.

Without contrasting the ruler of Puff with Charles the First, James the Second, and other worthies of that stamp, it is but fair to his subjects to own, that if they lose the challenge—if they are triumphed over by the ladies—if they have to eat "humble pie"—they owe their defeat entirely to the unconstitutional conduct of their King Crab.





CHAPTER XVIII.

PUFF AND LUFF!



HE morning broke as mornings will, regardless of any other laws than those of nature, gloomy and weeping.

But it did not appear that either "Lords" or "Ladies" were going to be controlled by the weather, whatever freaks it choose to enact.

Writers and readers are both gifted with double sight ; or, in other words, they are allowed peeps behind the curtain, by which means they can see all the villainy hatching in the villain's heart, while to everyone else he appears a miracle of goodness ! Thus, you and I, my dear reader, are enabled, through this power, to cast our eyes at one and the same moment on both Puff and Luff. On both are to be seen all the signs of a busy, nay, happy time. There is not a sad face on either island !

The squire is making a vast deal of row at Puff. Mrs. Spooner is in no end of a bustle at Luff. Captain Crabshawe is enunciating his final orders, with all the importance belonging to the last effort of power.

Mrs. Joscelyn is bringing to light all sorts of forgets, and recommending all kinds of ways of packing. For, most astonishing to relate, either hurried, or indifferent, or that they really have increased, the same packages that brought their things will not take them back !

Thanks to the "excellent convict," the gentlemen are in no such predicament. Notwithstanding the constant locking of their doors, it is remarkable the prodigious gaps in their wardrobes, now they are collecting their things. Fortunately they stumbled upon one of the amiable creature's hiding places, by which means Sam recovered two of his master's shirts, some of his own private property, a waistcoat of the

squire's, who would not touch it, the missing sweetbreads, once so beautifully larded, with sundry other eatables, the odour of which led to the discovery of all.

Sir George, not having much to do, sauntered down to the sea-shore to watch for the boat coming to Puff.

Miss Daintree, having entrusted her packing to Clara (we see), also strolls down, apparently to watch the waves ; but she is looking far away, even to the most distant horizon, where there certainly is a puffing of smoke.

At precisely the same moment the Puffs and Luffs go to breakfast on their respective islands.

Just as the squire says—"We will be off as soon as the boat comes," Mrs. Joscelyn remarks—"That she would wish to be early at home, to see that everything was nicely arranged for the evening's entertainment."

Mr. Frank Summers propounds he had better wait until the last boat, in order to see that everything is brought away. At that moment Miss Severn asks Mrs. Joscelyn if she shall remain with Susan to do the same thing.

The squire gives a sort of fillip to his tea-spoon, as he says—"I shall have my darling little Bessie again," just as Bessie says to her mother—"Won't pa be glad to see us !"

Bessie's ideas of the importance of the female sex are boundless—the consequence of her papa's spoiling, and the deference of her two brothers.

Breakfast being over, an extraordinary circumstance occurs to both islands. Sir George rushes in to say a boat is coming—not their boat, but another, and there is a policeman on board. It arrives with summonses for Messrs. Joscelyn and Spooner, together with Sir George Follett, Bart., and Samuel Meekes, his footman, to appear as witnesses against James Scuffy, Jonah Scuffy, and James Scuffy, Junior.

"God bless my soul !" exclaimed the squire, who only used this exclamation on extraordinary occasions ; "he is Jem himself—I protest Scruttles is his own Jem ; look here—look here, there can be no mistake !"

While they eagerly looked and scanned the papers, the policeman, imperturbably conscious of his own dignity, regards none of these things, but touches his hat to Sir George, and says—

"The witnesses his to return with me, Sir George ; the magistrates takes the case in hand—twelve o'clock."

"To-day !—this very day ? I am ready—all ready ! Come, George—come, Spoon—no more time, we must not keep the

magistrates waiting ! When I see that rascal, won't I shout in his ear, Jem !—Jem ! Scurry !”

“James Scuffy,” repeated the dignified policeman, touching his hat to the squire.

The squire was half-way down to the boat, when he bethought him of all the amiable ideas that he had had in his head while dressing—how he would be ready at the little dock to greet his Lizzy ; how he would welcome her home ; how he would tell her no place was home to him without her, etc., etc. He ran back to charge Frank with all sorts of messages to her, which that good fellow, he was sure, would faithfully deliver.

“But,” said Frank, “will not she be summoned also ?”

“God bless my soul !” exclaimed the squire for the second time in less than ten minutes, “of course !”

He ran back to the boat, and asked the question.

“The ladies, Mr. Joscelyn,” replied the dignified policeman, touching his hat, “are not summoned to-day. The magistrates,” he continued, “mean to make out a case for conviction upon the testimony of the gentlemen. If it is necessary to summon the ladies, they will be summoned.”

“I take that very kind of old Barker—he wishes to spare the ladies, if possible. I shall send old Barker the next salmon I hook.”

“Provided you land him, Squire.”

Thus the law, so powerful, interfered, and prevented on the part of the Puffs that triumphant and jocund landing, which they had pictured to themselves as the finale of the month of probation.

The day had recovered from its early fit of sulks, and was now condescending to bless the world with blue sky and cheery sunshine.

“What vessel is that ?” said Sir George, as they landed, and were about getting into the carriage that was to take them to the court.

Nobody knew. But we do, dear reader. This is the vessel that is about to create the extraordinary sensation at Luff. At least, Miss Daintree is running for her life up to the house, exclaiming, “She comes !—she comes !” Then, as was fitting, every Luffite runs out to see with her own eyes, and assure herself, and say to herself, “She comes !”

Now don't imagine this is the great two-funneled “Cannibal”—it is nothing of the sort. As it approaches, it presents the beautiful appearance of a pleasure-yacht—a screw.

She steams into the bay like a swan, and sweeps round to

her anchorage with the ease and grace of a racehorse. Before she was well settled in her place, a boat was lowered, and made its way straight to Luff. There was no policeman on board.

What took place on the island of Luff, upon the landing of that boat, has never been recorded.

Meantime, King Crab, now within a short space of being shorn of his crown, as he is already shorn of half his subjects, makes a prosaic landing with Frank, with the cook, with the cook's kitchen-maid, and all their worldly goods, at the little dock, about twelve o'clock.

"Othello's occupation gone," he feels a little depressed.

"We had better go somewhere and get a snack, Frank, as I suppose no one is at home at Deep-Cliffs."

"I intend staying here to deliver the squire's messages," answered Frank.

"What, here!—at the dock?"

"Yes; we all meet again, you know, at dinner."

"True—that reminds me I must be off."

"Drop my things as you go by, will you, at my house?"

Without a farewell or other word, the whilome king and his last subject parted.

No sooner was Captain Crabshawe out of sight, the cart packed with all the things, and sent off to Deep-Cliffs, to return again for the ladies' things, than Mr. Frank takes off his coat, loosens his braces, steps into the squire's private little sculling boat, and departs over the water.

Had anyone been sufficiently interested in his movements to watch him, they would have seen him making his way to Luff.

And now we approach the time when once more, as at the the opening of our story, Mrs. Joscelyn's drawing-room is filled with the same people assembled for dinner. The squire, radiant and jovial, was a sight to see. What with being once more at home—king over himself and all around him, conscious that he might say and do anything he pleased, overflowing with hospitable feelings, pleased with himself, delighted with his wife, and doting on little Bessie—he hardly knew how to contain himself.

As for Mr. Spooner, hanging over the chair of his Arabella, inspiration seemed at last to have condescended to visit him—he was so animated, so happy in his remarks, so energetic, so full of *bon hommie*—one might have supposed a bit of the squire's exuberance of spirit had got into his brain.

His Arabella, beautifully dressed in white, almost bridal,

looked at him, and admired with all the fondness of their bridal days.

Sir George had an anxious, fidgety air.

Frank was altogether in that sort of state that may be expressed by the word sublime.

It was Spooner's word; he had clapped Frank on the back, overcome with joviality, and had said, "Frank, you look sublime!"

Whether a countenance glowing with supremest happiness bordered upon the sublime, is not for us to say.

But how are we to do justice to the appearance of Captain Crabshawe? We have used up the word sublime, and must go and seek for others to express the dazzling effect he produced.

Captain Crabshawe was arrayed in an evening suit of black, cut after the fashion, and with all the improvements of the latest build of evening dress. His waistcoat was white, and his tie was white, and excellently tied. What was seen of his shirt, proved that it was a first-rate shirt, delicately embroidered, and was fastened with studs. His continuations were so admirably arranged, that they gave him quite a pair of gentlemanly legs, which were terminated by black silk stockings and patent leather pumps. Had anyone failed to notice these two elegant articles of dress, the admiration of the captain for them could not fail to draw the look of the inattentive to them. He was perpetually thrusting out first one foot and then the other, surveying them in every possible attitude, and apparently delighted with the effect of each.

In addition to being so beautifully dressed, the few hairs that time had left him, seemed to have taken umbrage at their hitherto straight walk of life, and absolutely reposed on his cranium in circular attitudes, elegantly disposed in careless grace. His hands were remarkably clean, and as if proud of the unusual occurrence, he flourished, first in one and then in the other, a large pocket-handkerchief, plentifully diluted with Bouquet de Jockey Club.

There are men of weak organisation who, in permitting their psychological structure to overpower their corporeal frame, have felt nervous, perhaps bashful, in assuming all at once, without preparing their friends, a character wholly opposite to that they have always borne.

But Captain Crabshawe had a mind as strong as the Egyptian sphinx, who has remained for so many ages calmly gazing at nothing.

It had hitherto been his pleasure to enact the part, and appear in the dress of a gamekeeper; it was now his pleasure to be a beau; and in clothing himself in beau garments, he also adopted beau manners.

He entered the room with a jaunty air; he bowed over Mrs. Joscelyn's hand as if he was Sir Charles Grandison, and he flung himself into a chair by Miss Severn with the ardent eagerness of a lover, assuming a supercilious air of pity for "Poor Frank," as he mentally said.

The squire, having already told almost everybody by themselves, is now narrating to the whole company together the interesting particulars of the trial of Scruttles.

"I do not know why I fancied he was his own Jem, but something possessed me with the idea that he was so. I would have paid anybody ten pounds for the news, I was so glad. And that is his mother—your old friend, Crab" (here Mrs. Joscelyn turned pale with fright, lest the squire, off his balance with an intoxication of happiness, should reveal a secret that he had told her—namely, that Scruttles' mother was Captain Crabshawe's foster-mother. Nobody had ventured, even in a whisper, to suppose they were foster-brothers. It was charitably concluded there was ten years between them. But the squire was to be trusted;) "and James Scuffy, junior, Esq., is his son and heir, and Jonah Scurry—Scuffy, I mean—is uncle, or father, or brother—I did not care to find out.

"How the fellow lied, and how it came out that all his life he lied, and how that even his own family were frightened of him! 'Our Jem,' says Mrs. Scurry—Scuffy, I mean—'our Jem never stops hat nothink. I be glad to think he be a-prison.'"

"'With that I went, Scruttles,' says I, and the fellow shook his fist at me in first-rate style. 'You will never get out again, Jem Scruttles,' said I—'this is your last turn.' Upon my word, the fellow rather pleased me—he showed himself such a true villain, I felt inclined ——"

"To give him another five shillings, Squire."

"No, Spooner—I felt inclined to tell him I respected him a great deal more in his true colours than when he was that odious, fawning, beastly hypocrite. He would have had a free pardon in Australia for betraying his companions, had it not been for the attempt to murder old Dad—not that it was Dad at all—it was a convict with whom he had quarrelled over some little trifle on board ship. I could not hear anything of Jude and Sal, which, I suppose, is just as well.

And Jem, the younger, was not altogether sure that Scruttles was his father. 'His mother told him so, but indeed he didn't know his-self.'

"I asked his mother's name. 'He worn't sure at all; he called her mother, and sometimes the neighbours called her big Bet.' Same name as you, Lizzy," continued the squire, glancing at his wife with high admiration. "But here is dinner—sort yourselves, my good friends; don't think me rude, ladies, but I must take my wife."

The A. S.'s followed, happy as love-birds. The captain seized upon Miss Severn, as by the right of a conqueror. Kate put her arm within Frank's whether he would or no, so Sir George was fain to content himself with Bessie. The dinner was excellent and noisy.

"Do let us enjoy ourselves," remonstrated the squire, as some one spoke about the challenge—"we will settle that affair afterwards."

So they ate and drank, laughed and chattered, with the highest delight.

The squire contradicted everything Crab said, and Crab exercised the same courtesy towards the squire, and neither lost their good-humour—the latter entertaining Miss Severn with all sorts of Crab jokes between whiles.

Sir George contrived to sit next to Kate, but as it was absolutely impossible to propose to her at the dinner-table, he only gave her to understand, in every other way, that she might expect him to do so the first opportunity.

That she was gentle, bashful, and blushing, only made him the more eager for the happy moment.

The dinner over, the servants withdrawn, the hour of reckoning, if it might be so called, came on.

"Which had won the challenge?"

Of the gentlemen, it may be said they allowed and disallowed; they confessed and retracted; they gave in and took back—at one moment they all agreed they had never been so happy—the next it was a miracle how they bore it.

It was evident that the gentlemen were anxious to be the winners.

"I conclude," said Mrs. Joscelyn, "from all you have said, that, on the whole, you have spent this month pretty much as if we had all been at home. You have had a mixture of good and bad; you have had sunshine and shade; your dull times and happy times—all this might have occurred here. But without reference to the challenge, I wish to know one thing. Has your sojourn at Puff so far softened your feelings

towards me that I may request you not to smoke in my dining-room, without running the chance of offending you"?

"You may—we were wrong; we acknowledge that, in this matter, you had more reason to be angry than we had. In fact," added the truthful squire, "I do not know what possessed me to turn my dining-room into a pot-house."

"I thank you most sincerely, gentlemen, for your assurances; and to show you that the ladies are neither bigoted nor arbitrary in the matter of smoking itself (only the place, my good friends), pray accept a present from each of us—I need not say they are the work of our own hands, and sufficed to while away some of the hours that passed a little heavily, wanting your society."

As Mrs. Joscelyn uttered these kindly words, Bessie presented a cigar-case to her father, Mrs. Joscelyn one to Sir George, Kate to Captain Crabshawe, Clara to Frank, the female A. S. to the male A. S. They were all beautifully worked, and embroidered with the names of the different gentlemen.

It is not to be told the effect of this graceful act of the "Ladies" upon the "Lords." They were overwhelmed with gratitude, with admiration, with remorse, one after another, in very strong fits. Having allowed a certain time to elapse for the expression of all these feelings, once more Mrs. Joscelyn said,

"But who has won the challenge?"

"There are the journals," said Mr. Spooner.

"But who is to judge the journals?"

"Will you allow me to do so?" said a voice at the door.

Every gentleman turned round. There was the famous admiral, accompanied by Colonel Erne.

"Here are our cards of invitation, Squire, permitting us to come a little before the Rampton world."

"I am delighted!" roared the squire—"delighted. Yours is the screw yacht, Admiral, that came into the bay this morning. Sit down!—sit down!—welcome, welcome, Colonel! I could not think who she was. I was so occupied with the trial of that beast Scruttles, I forgot to ask. This is the happiest event of the whole day. Judge!—of course you shall be judge. None of us would desire a better."

It is needless to say, that the admiral and his friend met with as hearty a reception as if they had just emerged out of a four years' imprisonment in an iceberg. Though why the little Rosebud should have blushed so violently at an elderly

little admiral (however famous) shaking hands with her so warmly, and sitting down by her in such a comfortable, fatherly manner, is a thing we must leave to philosophers, such as Spooner, to explain.

"We have dined, thank you," answered the admiral to the squire's hospitable offers; "we have brought white gloves and dancing-shoes—we mean to distinguish ourselves; but meanwhile, 'Who has won the challenge?'"

"That we cannot settle. It is agreed that our visit to Luff, on Crabshawe's account, is to be set against the hoisting of the ladies' flag when attacked by robbers."

"But did you not start first for assistance?"

"For that matter, we agreed to go to Luff the night before."

"Then perhaps you will be gallant enough to give the ladies this advantage."

"But," said Mr. Spooner, rising and forgetting altogether the cigar-cases and all his gratitude, fearing for nothing but the loss of the challenge, "I have heard—a rumour has reached me" (Mrs. S. began to pull his coat-tails, and blushed deeply at the prospect of being proved a traitor in the female camp), "in justice to my friends, Arabella, you must allow me to state, that though the ladies suffered no gentleman to land at Luff, they permitted themselves to be rowed about for many days together by a gentleman."

"No! no! really! that was too bad! Of course the ladies will lose the challenge, if it is true."

"It is true," answered Mrs. Joscelyn to all these exclamations; "but silence for one moment. Have I your permission, John, to divulge?"

"Oh! hang it, yes, Lizzy; divulge whatever you like."

But a slight blush also rose to the squire's cheek.

"It is true, for a few days a gentleman called at Luff and took some of us out in his boat, but, then, gentlemen, did you not spend a whole Sunday at Rampton, dining at Muggs's?"

There was a dead silence, broken at last by the admiral.

"You must again compromise—put the one thing against the other."

"But who has won the challenge?"

"Nobody."

"It is clear," said the admiral, "that this famous challenge is what sportsmen call a dead heat. The only thing to be done is to run it over again."

"No! oh! no! no! never!"

It was curious the chorus of emphatic negatives and protests that followed this remark.

"I shall have to examine each witness separately," said the admiral, laughing until the tears ran from his eyes. "Or rather," continued he, "those that are for another trial, hold up their hands."

Not even a little finger was visible.

"Those that are satisfied neither to win nor lose, hold up their hands."

There was an instantaneous display, the A. S.'s each holding up both, and, strange to say, so did the whilom King of Puff.

"Then let it be so," said the admiral, "and a very proper conclusion to the challenge. I hope the gentlemen will not forget the amiability of the ladies in allowing that they missed them; as for the gentlemen, I should be ashamed of my countrymen if they did not, and glory in the admission, too."

"We saved Frank!" exclaimed Captain Crabshawe, emphatically.

In fact, just as the admiral was speaking, the captain caught a glance that Frank sent straight to Miss Severn—a glance so full of love, of happiness, of triumph, that, amazed at the audacity of it, knowing, as Frank must know by this time, Captain Crabshawe's private intentions, he was irresistibly impelled to say what he did.

"From what, my dear Crab?" replied Frank, with the most imperturbable countenance.

"From marrying!"

Here the admiral burst into such fits of laughter, he nearly rolled off his chair.

Frank rose up, steadfastly regarding the Puffites with a charming and benign smile.

"If, my dear Puffs," said he, "you banished yourselves from the society of the ladies for my sake, it was labour lost. I went with you, already engaged to be married."

The hubbub was tremendous—part upbraiding, part commending. As soon as the noise ceased he continued:

"Having the permission of my *fiancée* (glancing at Clara, who frankly gave him her hand) to proclaim our engagement, I only waited a favourable moment to demand from you those hearty congratulations, without which I scarcely feel my bliss complete. I have to thank you, my dear Crabshawe, for affording me this opportunity."

"Frank, you are a hypocrite!" growled that worthy in his ear.

"Try Miss Daintree," whispered Frank back again.

Before the felicitations were over, the hint was taken.

"Frank," said the squire, "how close you kept your secret! If I remember right, you told a—you said it was too late!"

"You will allow, Squire, that when a thing is already done, it is too late to do it."

"A subterfuge, Frank, which, in my opinion, is more than
——"

"Hush, John, let Frank finish what he has to say."

"Go on, Frank."

"Admiral—Squire—gentlemen—when a man sees opening before him a glimpse of that paradise our much-respected forefather Adam lived in, it is not likely that he will lose the chance of securing an entrance into it. Adam, as we know, lost paradise through his devotion to his companion. The angels, melted by the nobleness of the deed, brought ever and ever constant petitions to the Footstool of the Throne of Heaven for permission for Adam's descendants to create their own paradise. In virtue of this grace, seeing the opening of a paradise before me, I essayed to win the gate. Just one month, four days, thirteen hours, and so many minutes, at the moment when you, Crabshawe, were flirting with Miss Daintree on the settee, I placed my heart, my hopes, my happiness in the hands of my dearest Clara. She accepted all, giving me her love in return, and her promise that, within a month after our trial, we should summon Puffs and Luffs to our wedding. We agreed to keep the matter secret from all but one person; and it was through fear lest I should betray myself that I refused to accompany you to Luff on that memorable morning. To you, dear Mrs. Joscelyn, I owe more than I can express, not only for your warm sympathy, your love and fondness for my intended wife (though who can help loving her?), but because I feel sure that it is to your example as a wife, that I owe Clara's willing consent to be mine. The beautiful and lovely character of wife and mother, shone with such radiance in the house of Squire Joscelyn, that few girls could witness the sight without longing to imitate it. As for me, when possessed of my paradise, I know it will be my own fault if I lose it. During the long hours that we spent at Puff, none felt either weary or dull to me, for I spent the time in endeavouring to make myself worthy to have an angel for my wife; and life itself will be scarcely long enough for me to thank God for the gift of her."

Frank sat down, glowing with love and happiness, by his intended bride, overwhelmed with plaudits and congratulations.

Mrs. Spooner sobbed aloud, her feelings deeply moved.

The admiral felt it necessary to shake hands with everybody near him.

But the company were arriving.

Fast and furious was heard the rattling of the carriages ; loud and sonorous the announcement of the visitors. Everybody that had the slightest pretence to come, came.

Dancing began at once. Between whiles was incessant talking, incessant congratulations, and an infinitude of questions regarding the challenge, which subject lost a good deal of its interest when it was found to be a "drawn battle."

As for saying that the admiral had spent his best days in the Arctic circle, and had worked so hard there he had no more work left in him, they should have seen him dance, they should have seen him making everybody else dance. He enjoyed himself with an enthusiasm that was quite admirable. Famous as he had been battling against ice and snow, bears and famine, he was making himself equally famous, dancing, laughing, and joking, at Squire Joscelyn's ball.

"Frank ! Frank," murmured a sad voice in his ear, "do you see that ?"

"I do," answered Frank, his happy face turning as grave as it could, for the sake of his friend George.

"She will not dance with me, though she allows she is not engaged."

"She is wise, George—it is for your good ; cannot you see this yourself ?"

"It is impossible—I will not believe it. I merely wish her to know that I am only waiting the opportunity to ask her to accept everything I possess ! Will you tell her ?"

"No, my dear George, I dare not. Dismiss all thoughts of her from your mind ; she has a younger sister—prettier, more like Mrs. Joscelyn !"

"Oh ! Frank, in your own happiness you forget my misery !"

"Frank !—Frank !" said another voice ; "do come here !"

"Well, Crab, what is it ?"

"I can't think what has got over the wimmen ; when one wants to be civil, they won't let one !"

"Who has offended you ?"

"Miss Daintree won't even look at me, and that fellow

that Colonel Erne, is always whispering in her ear. I have a mind to eat his head off !”

“Do, Crab, and see what will become of it.”

“Frank, you are all right yourself, and you don’t care for other folks’ feelings !”

“Pray excuse me, but you do not mean to say you are thinking of offering to Miss Daintree ?”

“Why not ?”

“Then it is useless my having any feeling for you ; I was only in joke when I said, ‘Try Miss Daintree !’”

“Why should it be a joke ?”

“Because you would do for her grandfather, rather than her husband !”

Aware of the audacity of this speech, Frank fled for his life after saying it, and took refuge behind Miss Severn’s crinoline.

From that fortification he saw the forlorn Sir George holding a colloquy with an equally forlorn Sam ; he felt sure George was ordering his carriage, and Sam was somehow delighted it was ordered.

Meantime, the admiral, finding this was the last dance before supper, went to secure his favourite partner, Miss Bessie.

“Oh, yes, Sir Admiral !” exclaimed Bessie, delighted.

“And yet, Bessie, you refused me,” said a languishing voice.

“Because you only asked me, for no one else would dance with you !”

And Miss Bessie skipped away, as if a gorilla was about to claim her for a partner.

“It did not seem to me, little Bessie,” said the admiral, as they took their places, “that you were very civil to the captain.”

“Oh ! Sir Admiral, he had made me very angry. He asked me how old I was ; and when I told him he gave a great sort of sigh like a frog would, and said—‘Eight long years, Bessie, before I can offer you my hand and heart.’ ‘I do not want either,’ I said. ‘Oh ! you will think very differently at that age, pretty Bessie !’ and I answered—‘Don’t call me names, Captain Crabshawe, because mamma does not allow people to do so !’ ‘People ! my dear Bessie, I am very different !’ ‘I won’t be deared by you, Sir !’ I said ; and then luckily, Sir Admiral, you came and rescued me !”

“Well, Bessie, as far as I can see, you appear to have had an offer. He paid you a great compliment !”

"A compliment ! Oh ! no, he was very insulting, I thought, asking a lady's age !"

"But he offered you his hand and his heart ?"

"I would not touch his hand for anything ; and as for his heart, Kate says he has none ! Oh ! Sir Admiral, if you will please to forgive my saying so, I hate him !"

"I suppose I must excuse you, especially as we are now all going in to supper. I have a little business to do after supper, Bessie, so let us make haste and get good places !"

And this was the admiral's business :

The healths of the engaged couple having been proposed and drank with the greatest enthusiasm, and Frank having returned thanks in a manner worthy of the occasion and his prospects, the admiral now rose up, and charged them to fill their glasses again.

Now, the Rampton world not only delighted to see so famous an admiral in the same room, but, highly gratified at his dancing and amusing himself just as if he was a mere mortal like themselves, were so overcome at his condescension in rising to make a speech, and giving them such a cheery order to fill their glasses, that they rapped the table and made such vocal demonstrations of approbation, that there was no possibility of a single word of what he said being heard, unless he had been privately gifted with the screech of a railway engine.

So he prudently waited until there was a lull.

Of course the moment he opened his mouth they began ; but at last, roared into silence by the squire, a calm ensued.

"Gentlemen and ladies,—I desire to take this opportunity of thanking the Puffs and Luffs for affording me a vast deal of amusement ; laughing is good physic for all diseases, and though, thank God, I have none, a hearty laugh does me a world of good."

Here the admiral paused for a moment ; it seemed, by the expression of his countenance, as if there had been times with him when death met him face to face daily, and laughter was unseemly. It appeared as if he paused to thank God that such trial was over.

"You may think, ladies and gentlemen, that, being a sailor, I have no experience in the female character ; but I have so much that, had no robbers attacked their island—robbers of two sorts, you will please to remember, robbers of purses, and robbers of hearts—they would certainly have gained the victory. And is there a man amongst us who would have done otherwise than rejoice ? (Cheers.)

“But, in truth, my good friends, though this challenge was apparently a frolic, it was the means of a good end. Our Puffs and Luffs, doubtless, thought the whole affair a lark, as we sailors love to call it; but all the time it was fate—it was pre-ordained. The Almighty looks down upon us all, and arranges our affairs with unerring wisdom. He saw two hearts so formed for each other, that He issued the command, ‘Let them meet!’ They did meet. The famous challenge introduced them to each other.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, you have drank the healths of Mr. Summers and his intended bride; I now call upon you to drink the health of my dear friend, Colonel Erne, and his future wife. Miss Daintree, your health, and a thousand good wishes;—Erne, yours. Squire, give the time for a good British cheer, an accomplishment that no other nation but England can perform—a hearty cheer—because this famous challenge, though caused by, has not ended in,

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